A Moment of Madness

Florence Marryat

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A MOMENT OF MADNESS,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,
AUTHOR OF 'PHYLLIDA,' 'FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
LITTLE WHITE SOULS—*Continued*, .	1
STILL WATERS, ...	21
CHIT-CHAT FROM ANDALUSIA, . .	59
THE SECRET OF ECONOMY, . .	75
'MOTHER,'	93
IN THE HEART OF THE ARDENNES,	133
A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE, . .	165
THE GHOST OF CHARLOTTE CRAY, .	203

LITTLE WHITE SOULS

(Continued).

ETHEL calls the woman some opprobrious epithet, but walks away nevertheless, and lets her do as she will; only the next day she writes a full account to Charlie of what she has gone through, and tells him she thinks all the servants are going mad. In which opinion he entirely agrees with her.

'For "mad" read "bad,"' he writes back again, 'and I'm with you. There is no doubt upon the matter, my dear girl. The brutes don't like the cold, and are playing tricks upon you to try and force you to return to the plains. It is a common thing in this country. Don't give way to them, but tell them I'll stop

their pay all round if anything unpleasant happens again. I think now you must confess it would have been better to take my advice and try a trip home instead. However, as you are at Mandalinati, don't come back until your object in going there is accomplished. I wish I could join you, but it is impossible just yet. Jack Lawless is obliged to go north on business, and I have promised to accompany him. Keep up a good heart, dearest, and don't let those brutes think they have any power to annoy or frighten you.'

'Going north on business!' exclaims Ethel bitterly; 'and she is going too, I suppose; and Charlie can find time to go with them, though he cannot come to me. Oh, it is too hard! It is more than any woman can be expected to bear! I'm sure I wish I had gone to England instead. Then I should at least have had my dear sister to tell my troubles to, and he—he would have been free to flirt with that wretched woman as much as ever he chose.'

And the poor wife lies in her bed that night too unhappy to sleep, while she pictures her husband doing all sorts of dishonourable things, instead of snoring,

as he really is, in his own deserted couch. Her room adjoins that in which the Dye is sleeping with her little girl, and the door between them stands wide open. From where she lies, Ethel can see part of the floor of Katie's bedroom, from which the moonlight is excluded in consequence of the great black shawl which the nurse continues to pin nightly across the window-pane. Suddenly, as she watches the shaded floor without thinking of it, a streak of moonshine darts right athwart it, as if a corner of the curtain had been raised. Always full of fears for her child, Ethel slips off her own bed, and with noiseless, unslippered feet runs into the next room, only in time to see part of a white dress upon the terrace as some unseen hand hastily drops the shawl again. She crosses the floor, and opening the window, looks out. Nobody is in sight. From end to end of the broad terraces the moonlight lies undisturbed by any shadow, though she fancies her ear can discern the rustling of a garment sweeping the stone foundation. As she turns to the darkened chamber again, she finds the Dye is sitting up, awake and trembling.

'Who raised that shawl just now,

Dye? Tell me—I will know!' says Mrs Dunstan.

'Oh, mam! How can poor Dye tell? Perhaps it was the English lady come to take my little missy! Oh! when shall we go back to Mudlianah and be safe again?'

'English fiddlesticks! Don't talk such rubbish to me. I am up to all your tricks, but you won't frighten me, and so you may tell the others. And I shall not go back to Mudlianah one day sooner for anything you may say or do—'

Yet Mrs Ethel does not feel quite comfortable, even though her words are so brave. But shortly afterwards her thoughts are turned into another direction, whether agreeably or otherwise, we shall see. As she is sitting at breakfast the next morning, a shouting of natives and a commotion in the courtyard warns her of a new arrival. She imagines it is her husband, and rushes to meet him. But, to her surprise and chagrin, the figure that emerges from the transit is that of Mrs Lawless looking as lovely in her travelling dress and rumpled hair as ever she did in the most extravagant *costume de bal.*

'Are you surprised to see me?' she cried, as she jumps to the ground. 'Well,

my dear, you can hardly be more surprised than I am to find myself here. But the fact is, Jack and the colonel are off to Hoolabad on business, so I thought I would take advantage of their absence to pay you a visit. And I hope you are glad to see me?'

Of course Mrs Dunstan says she *is* glad, and in a measure her words are true. She is glad to keep this fascinating wicked flirt under her eye, where it is impossible she can tamper with the affections of her beloved Charlie, and she is glad of her company and conversation, which is as sociable and bright as a clever little woman can make it. Mrs Lawless is full of sympathy, too, with Mrs Dunstan's fears and the bad behaviour of her servants, and being a very good linguist, she promises to obtain all the information she can from them, and make them fully understand their mistress's intentions in return.

'It's lucky I came, my dear,' she says brightly, 'or they might have made themselves still more offensive to you. But you have the dear colonel and Jack to thank for that, for I shouldn't have left home if they had not done so.'

'Ah, just as I imagined,' thinks Ethel,

'she would not have left him unless she had been obliged, and she has the impudence to tell me so to my very face. However, she is here, and I must make the best of it, and be thankful it has happened so.' And so she lays herself out to please her guest in order to keep her by her as long as she possibly can.

But a few days after Cissy's arrival she receives a letter that evidently discomposes her. She keeps on exclaiming, 'How provoking!' and 'How annoying!' as she peruses it, and folds it up with an unmistakable frown on her brow.

'What is the matter?' demands Ethel. 'I hope it is not bad news.'

'Yes, it is very bad news. They have never gone after all, Mrs Dunstan, and Jack is so vexed I should have left Mudlianah before he started.'

'But now you are here, you will not think of returning directly, I hope,' says Ethel, in an anxious voice.

'Oh no, I suppose not—it would be so childish—that is, unless Jack wishes me to do so. But I have hardly recovered from the effects of the journey yet; those transits shake so abominably. No, I shall

certainly stay here for a few weeks, unless my husband orders me to return.'

Yet Mrs Lawless appears undecided and restless from that moment, which Mrs Dunstan ascribes entirely to her wish to return to Mudlianah, and her flirtation with the colonel, and the suspicion makes her receive any allusions to such a contingency with marked coolness. Cissy Lawless busies herself going amongst the natives, and talking with them about the late disturbances at the castle, and her report is not satisfactory.

'Are you easily frightened, Mrs Dunstan?' she asks her one day suddenly.

'No, I think not. Why?'

'Because you must think me a fool if you like, but I am; and the stories your servants have told me have made me quite nervous of remaining at the castle.'

'A good excuse to leave me and go back to Mudlianah,' thinks Mrs Dunstan; and then she draws herself up stiffly, and says, 'Indeed! You must be very credulous if you believe what natives say. What may these dreadful stories consist of?'

'Oh! I daresay you will turn them into ridicule, because, perhaps, you don't believe in ghosts.'

'Ghosts! I should think not, indeed. Who does?'

'I do, Mrs Dunstan, and for the good reason that I have seen more than one.'

'You have seen a spirit? What will you tell me next?'

'That I hope you never may, for it is not a pleasant sight. But that has nothing to do with the present rumours. I find that your servants are really frightened of remaining at the castle. They say there is not a native in the villages round about who would enter it for love or money, and that the reason the Rajah Mati Singh has deserted it is on account of its reputation for being haunted.'

'Every one has heard of that,' replies Ethel, with a heightened colour, 'but no one believes it. Who should it be haunted by?'

'You know what a bad character the rajah bears for cruelty and oppression. They say he built this castle for a harem, and kidnapped a beautiful English woman, a soldier's daughter, and confined her here for some years. But, finding one day that she had been attempting to communicate with her own people, he had her most barbarously put to death, with her child and

the servants he suspected of conniving with her. Then he established a native harem here, but was obliged to remove it, for no infant born in the house ever lived. They say that as soon as a child is born under this roof, the spirit of the white woman appears to carry it away in place of her own. But the natives declare that she is not satisfied with the souls of black children, and that she will continue to appear until she has secured a white child like the one that was murdered before her eyes. And your servants assure me that she has been seen by several of them since coming here, and they feel certain that she is waiting for your baby to be born that she may carry it away.'

'What folly!' cries Mrs Dunstan, whose cheeks have nevertheless grown very red. 'It's all a *ruse* in order to make me go home again. In the first place, I should be ashamed to believe in such nonsense, and in the second, I do not expect my baby to be born until I am back in Mudlianah.'

'But accidents happen some times, you know, dear Mrs Dunstan, and it would be a terrible thing if you were taken ill up here. Don't you think, all things con-

sidered, it would be more prudent for you to go home again?'

'No, I do not,' replied Mrs Dunstan, decidedly. 'I came here for my child's health, and I shall stay until it is re-established.'

'But you must feel so lonely by yourself.'

'I have plenty to do and to think of,' says Ethel, 'and I never want company whilst I am with my little Katie.'

She is determined to take neither pity nor advice from the woman who is so anxious to join the colonel again.

'I am glad to hear you say so,' replied Mrs Lawless, somewhat timidly, 'because it makes it easier for me to tell you that I am afraid I must leave you. I dare-say you will think me very foolish, but I am too nervous to remain any longer at Mandalinati. I have not slept a wink for the last three nights. I must go back to Jack.'

'Oh! you must go back to Jack!' repeats Mrs Dunstan, with a sneer at Mrs Lawless. 'I hate duplicity! Why can't you tell the truth at once?'

'Mrs Dunstan! What do you mean?'

'I mean that I know why you are going

back to Mudlianah as well as you do yourself. It's all very well to lay it upon "Jack," or this ridiculous ghost; but you don't deceive me. I have known your treachery for a long time past. It is not "Jack" you go back to cantonment for—but my husband, and you are a bad, wicked woman.'

'For your husband!' cried Cissy Lawless, jumping to her feet. 'How dare you insult me in this manner! What have I ever done to make you credit such an absurdity?'

'You may call it an absurdity, madam, if you choose, but I call it a diabolical wickedness. Haven't you made appointments with him, and walked at night in the garden with him, and done all you could to make him faithless to his poor, trusting wife? And you a married woman, too. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

'Mrs Dunstan, I will not stand this language any longer. I flirt with your husband!—a man old enough to be my father! You must be out of your senses! Why, he must be fifty if he's a day!'

'He's not fifty,' screams Ethel, in her rage. 'He was only forty-two last birthday.'

'I don't believe it. His hair is as grey

as a badger. Flirt with the colonel, indeed. When I want to flirt I shall look for a younger and a handsomer man than your husband, I can tell you.'

'You'd flirt with him if he were eighty, you bold, forward girl, and I shall take good care to inform Mr Lawless of the way you have been carrying on with him.'

'I shall go down at once, and tell him myself. You don't suppose I would remain your guest after what has happened for an hour longer than is absolutely necessary. I wish you good morning, Mrs Dunstan, and a civil tongue for the future.'

'Oh, of course, you'll go to Mudlianah. I was quite prepared for that, and an excellent excuse you have found to get back again. Good day, madam, and the less we meet before you start the better. Grey haired, indeed! Why, many men are grey at thirty, and I've often been told that he used to be called "Handsome Charlie" when he first joined the service.'

But the wife's indignant protests do not reach the ears of Cissy Lawless, who retires to her own apartments and does not leave them until she gets into the transit again and is rattled back to Mud-

lianah. When she is fairly off there is no denying that Ethel feels very lonely and very miserable. She is not so brave as she pretends to be, and she is conscious that she has betrayed her jealous feelings in a most unladylike manner, which will make Charlie very angry with her when he comes to hear of it. So what between her rage and her despair, she passes the afternoon and evening in a very hysterical condition of weeping and moaning, and the excitement and fatigue, added to terror at the stories she has heard, bring on the very calamity against which Mrs Lawless warned her. In the middle of the night she is compelled by illness to summon her Dye to her assistance, and two frightened women do their best to alarm each other still more, until with the morning's light a poor little baby is born into the world, who had no business, strictly speaking, to have entered it till two months later, and the preparations for whose advent are all down at Mudlianah. Poor Ethel has only strength after the event to write a few faint lines in pencil to Colonel Dunstan, telling him she is dying, and begging him to come to her at once, and then to lie down in a state of utter despair,

which would assail most women under the circumstances. She has not sufficient energy even to reprove the Dye, who laments over the poor baby as if it were a doomed creature, and keeps starting nervously, as night draws on again, at every shadow, as though she expected to see the old gentleman at her elbow.

She wears out Ethel's patience at last, for the young mother is depressed and feeble and longs for sleep. So she orders the nurse to lay her little infant on her arm, and to go into the next room as usual and lie down beside Katie's cot ; and after some expostulation, and many shakings of her head, the Dye complies with her mistress's request. For some time after she is left alone, Ethel lies awake, too exhausted even to sleep, and as she does so, her mind is filled with the stories she has heard, and she clasps her little fragile infant closer to her bosom as she recalls the history of the poor murdered mother, whose child was barbarously slaughtered before her eyes. But she has too much faith in the teaching of her childhood quite to credit such a marvellous story, and she composes herself by prayer and holy thoughts until she sinks into a calm and

dreamless slumber. When she wakes some hours after, it is not suddenly, but as though some one were pulling her back to consciousness. Slowly she realises her situation, and feels that somebody, the Dye she supposes, is trying to take the baby from her arms without disturbing her.

'Don't take him from me, dye,' she murmurs, sleepily; 'he is so good—he has not moved all night.'

But the gentle pressure still continues, and then Ethel opens her eyes and sees not the Dye but a woman, tall and finely formed, and fair as the day, with golden hair floating over her shoulders, and a wild, mad look in her large blue eyes, who is quietly but forcibly taking the baby from her. Already she has one bare arm under the child, and the other over him—and her figure is bent forward, so that her beautiful face is almost on a level with that of Mrs Dunstan's.

'Who are you? What are you doing?' exclaims Ethel in a voice of breathless alarm, although she does not at once comprehend why she should experience it. The woman makes no answer, but with her eyes fixed on the child with

a sort of wild triumph draws it steadily towards her.

'Leave my baby alone! How dare you touch him?' cries Ethel, and then she calls aloud, 'Dye! Dye! come to me!'

But at the sound of her voice the woman draws the child hastily away, and Ethel sees it reposing on her arm, whilst she slowly folds her white robes about the little form, and hides it from view.

'Dye! Dye!' again screams the mother, and as the nurse rushes to her assistance the spirit woman slowly fades away, with a smile of success upon her lips.

'Bring a light. Quick!' cries Ethel. 'The woman has been here; she has stolen my baby. Oh, Dye, make haste! help me to get out of bed. I will get it back again if I die in the attempt.'

The Dye runs for a lamp, and brings it to the bedside as Mrs Dunstan is attempting to leave it.

'Missus dreaming!' she exclaims quickly, as the light falls on the pillow. 'The baby is there—safe asleep. Missus get into bed again, and cover up well, or she will catch cold!'

'Ah! my baby,' cries Ethel, hysterically, as she seizes the tiny creature in her arms, 'is he really there? Thank God! It was only a dream. But, Dye, what is the matter with him, and why is he so stiff and cold? He cannot—he cannot be—dead!'

Yes, it was true! It was not a dream after all. The white woman has carried the soul of the white child away with her, and left nothing but the senseless little body behind. As Ethel realises the extent of her misfortune, and the means by which it has been perpetrated, she sinks back upon her pillow in a state of utter unconsciousness.

. . . . . .

When she once more becomes aware of all that is passing around her, she finds her husband by her bedside, and Cissy Lawless acting the part of the most devoted of nurses.

'It was so wrong of me to leave you, dear, in that hurried manner,' she whispers one day when Mrs Dunstan is convalescent, 'but I was so angry to think you could suspect me of flirting with your dear old husband. I ought to have told you from the first what all those meetings and

letters meant, and I should have done so only they involved the character of my darling Jack. The fact is, dear, my boy got into a terrible scrape up country—and the colonel says the less we talk of it the better—however, it had something to do with that horrid gambling that men will indulge in, and it very nearly lost Jack his commission, and would have done so if it hadn't been for the dear colonel. But he and I plotted and worked together till we got Jack out of his scrape, and now we're as happy as two kings; and you will be so too, won't you dear Mrs Dunstan, now that you are well again, and know that your Charlie has flirted no more than yourself?'

'I have been terribly to blame,' replies poor Ethel. 'I see that now, and I have suffered for it too, bitterly.'

'We have all suffered, my darling,' says the colonel, tenderly; 'but it may teach us a valuable lesson, never to believe that which we have not proved.'

'And never to disbelieve that which we have not disproved,' retorts Ethel. 'If I had only been a little more credulous and a little less boastful of my own courage, I might not have lived to see my child torn

from my arms by the spirit of the white woman.'

And whatever Ethel Dunstan believed or not, I have only, in concluding her story, to reiterate my assertion that the circumstances of it are *strictly true*.

THE END.

STILL WATERS.

I OFTEN wonder if when, as the Bible tells us, 'the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed,' they will be revealed to our fellow-creatures as well as to the Almighty Judge of men.

I am not usually given to philosophise, but the above remark was drawn from me by the receipt of a letter this morning from my niece, Justina Trevor, announcing the death of her 'dear friend,' Mrs Benson, which recalled the remembrance of an incident that took place a few months since, whilst I was staying at Durham Hall, in Derbyshire, the estate of her late husband, Sir Harry Trevor. I am an old bachelor, though not so old as I look; yet when I

confess that I write 'General' before my name, and have served most of my time in hot climates, it will readily be believed that no one would take me for a chicken. It was after an absence of fourteen years that, last November, I arrived in England, and put up at an hotel near Covent Garden, which had been a favourite resort of mine during my last stay in London. But I soon found that I had made a great mistake, for town was dark, damp, dirty, deserted, detestable; in fact, no adjective, however long and however strong, could convey an adequate idea of the impression made upon me by a review of the great metropolis; and it was with a feeling of intense relief that I perused a letter from my niece Justina, to whom I had duly announced my advent, in which she insisted that her 'dear uncle' must spend his first Christmas in England nowhere but at Durham Hall, with Sir Harry and herself. Now Justina, if not my only, is certainly my nearest relative, and *I* knew that *she* knew that I was an old fellow on the shady side of sixty-five, with a couple of pounds or so laid by in the Oriental Bank, and with no one to leave them to but herself or her children; but I was

not going to let that fact interfere with my prospects of present comfort; and so, ordering my servant to repack my travelling cases, the next day but one saw us *en route* for Derbyshire.

It was evening when I arrived at Durham Hall, but even on a first view I could not help being struck with the munificent manner in which all the arrangements of the household seemed to be conducted, and reflected with shame on the unworthy suspicion I had entertained respecting those two pounds of mine in the Oriental Bank, which I now felt would be but as a drop in the ocean to the display of wealth which surrounded me. The hall was full of guests, assembled to enjoy the hunting and shooting season, and to spend the coming Christmas, and amongst them I heard several persons of title mentioned; but my host and hostess paid as much attention to me as though I had been the noblest there, and I felt gratified by the reception awarded me.

I found my niece but little altered, considering the number of years which had elapsed since I had last seen her; her children were a fine, blooming set of boys and girls, whilst her husband, both in ap-

pearance and manners, far exceeded my expectations. For it so happened that I had not seen Sir Harry Trevor before, my niece's marriage having taken place during my absence from England; but Justina had never ceased to correspond with me, and from her letters I knew that the union had been as happy as it was prosperous. But now that I met him I was more than pleased, and voted his wife a most fortunate woman. Of unusual height and muscular build, Sir Harry Trevor possessed one of those fair, frank Saxon faces which look as if their owners had never known trouble. His bright blue eyes shone with careless mirth and his yellow beard curled about a mouth ever ready to smile in unison with the outstretching of his friendly hand.

He was a specimen of a free, manly, and contented Englishman, who had everything he could desire in this world, and was thankful for it. As for Justina, she seemed perfectly to adore him; her eyes followed his figure wherever it moved; she hung upon his words, and refused to stir from home, even to take a drive or walk, unless he were by her side.

'I must congratulate you upon your husband,' I said to her, as we sat together

on the second day of my visit. 'I think he is one of the finest fellows I ever came across, and seems as good as he is handsome.'

'Ah, he is, indeed!' she replied, with ready enthusiasm; 'and you have seen the least part of him, uncle. It would be impossible for me to tell you how good he is in all things. We have been married now for more than ten years, and during that time I have never had an unkind word from him, nor do I believe he has ever kept a thought from me. He is as open as the day, and could not keep a secret if he tried. Dear fellow!' and something very like a tear twinkled in the wife's eyes.

'Ay, ay,' I replied, 'that's right. I don't know much about matrimony, my dear, but if man and wife never have a secret from one another they can't go far wrong. And now perhaps you will enlighten me a little about these guests of yours, for there is such a number of them that I feel quite confused.'

Justina passed her hand across her eyes and laughed.

'Yes, that is dear Harry's whim. He will fill the house at Christmas from top to basement, and I let him have his way, though all

my visitors are not of my own choosing. With whom shall I commence, uncle?'

We were sitting on a sofa together during the half-hour before dinner, and one by one the guests, amounting perhaps to fifteen or twenty, came lounging into the drawing-room.

'Who, then, is that very handsome woman with the scarlet flower in her hair?'

'Oh, do you call *her* handsome?' (I could tell at once from the tone of Justina's voice that the owner of the scarlet flower was no favourite of hers.) 'That is Lady Amabel Scott, a cousin of Harry's: indeed, if she were not, she should never come into *my* house. Now, there's a woman, uncle, whom I can't bear—a forward, presuming, flirting creature, with no desire on earth but to attract admiration. Look how she's dressed this evening—absurd, for a home party. I wonder that her husband, Mr Warden Scott (that is he looking over the photograph book), can allow her to go on so! It is quite disgraceful. I consider a flirting married woman one of the most dangerous members of society.'

'But you can have no reason to fear her attacks,' I said, confidently.

The colour mounted to her face. My

niece is not a pretty woman—indeed, I had already wondered several times what made Trevor fall in love with her—but this little touch of indignation improved her.

'*Of course not!* But Lady Amabel spares no one, and dear Harry is so good-natured that he refuses to see how conspicuous she makes both him and herself. I have tried to convince him of it several times, but he is too kind to think evil of any one, and so I must be as patient as I can till she goes. Thank Heaven, she does not spend her Christmas with us! For my part, I can't understand how one can see any beauty in a woman with a turned-up nose.'

'Ho, ho!' I thought to myself; 'this is where the shoe pinches, is it? And if a lady will secure an uncommonly good-looking and agreeable man all to herself, she must expect to see others attempt to share the prize with her.'

Poor Justina! With as many blessings as one would think heart could desire, she was not above poisoning her life's happiness by a touch of jealousy; and so I pitied her. It is a terrible foe with which to contend.

'But this is but one off the list,' I continued, wishing to divert her mind from

the contemplation of Sir Harry's cousin. 'Who are those two dark girls standing together at the side table? and who is that quiet-looking little lady who has just entered with the tall man in spectacles?'

'Oh, those—the girls—are the Misses Rushton; they are pretty, are they not?—were considered quite the belles of last season—and the old lady on the opposite side of the fireplace is their mother: their father died some years since.'

'But the gentleman in spectacles? He looks quite a character.'

'Yes, and is considered so, but he is very good and awfully clever. That is Professor Benson: you must know him and his wife too, the "quiet-looking little lady," as you called her just now. They are the greatest friends I have in the world, and it was at their house that I first met Harry. I am sure you would like Mary Benson, uncle; she is shy, but has an immense deal in her, and is the kindest creature I ever knew. You would get on capitally together. I must introduce you to each other after dinner. And the professor and she are so attached—quite a model couple, I can assure you.'

'Indeed! But whom have we here?'

as the door was thrown open to admit five gentlemen and two ladies.

'Lord and Lady Mowbray; Colonel Green and his son and daughter; Captain Mackay and Mr Cecil St John,' whispered Lady Trevor, and as she concluded dinner was announced, and our dialogue ended.

As the only persons in whom my niece had expressed much interest were Lady Amabel Scott and Mrs Benson, I took care to observe these two ladies very narrowly during my leisure moments at the dinner-table, and came to the conclusion that, so far as I could judge, her estimate was not far wrong of either of them. Lady Amabel was a decided beauty, notwithstanding the 'turned-up nose' of which her hostess had spoken so contemptuously; it was also pretty evident that she was a decided flirt. During my lengthened career of five-and-sixty years, I had always been credited with having a keen eye for the good points of a woman or a horse; but seldom had I met with such vivid colouring, such flashing eyes, and such bright speaking looks as now shone upon me across the table from the cousin of Sir Harry Trevor. She was a lovely blonde, in the heyday of her youth and beauty,

and she used her power unsparingly and without reserve. My observation quickened by what Justina's flash of jealousy had revealed, I now perceived, or thought I perceived, that our host was by no means insensible to the attractions of his fair guest, for, after conducting her in to dinner and placing her by his side, he devoted every second not demanded by the rights of hospitality to her amusement. Yet, Lady Amabel seemed anything but desirous of engrossing his attention; on the contrary, her arrows of wit flew far and wide, and her bright glances flashed much in the same manner, some of their beams descending even upon me, spite of my grey hairs and lack of acquaintanceship. One could easily perceive that she was a universal favourite; but as Mr Warden Scott seemed quite satisfied with the state of affairs, and calmly enjoyed his dinner, whilst his wife's admirers, in their fervent admiration, neglected to eat theirs, I could not see that any one had a right to complain, and came to the conclusion that my niece, like many another of her sex, had permitted jealousy to blind her judgment.

I felt still more convinced of this when I turned to the contemplation of the other

lady to whom she had directed my attention—the professor's wife, who was her dearest friend, and through whose means she had first met Sir Harry Trevor. There was certainly nothing to excite the evil passions of either man or woman in Mrs Benson. Small and insignificant in figure, she was not even pleasing in countenance; indeed, I voted her altogether uninteresting, until she suddenly raised two large brown eyes, soft as a spaniel's and shy as a deer's, and regarded me. She dropped them again instantly, but as she did so I observed that her lashes were long and dark, and looked the longer and darker for resting on perfectly pallid cheeks. *Au reste*, Mrs Benson had not a feature that would repay the trouble of looking at twice, and the plain, dark dress she wore still farther detracted from her appearance. But she looked a good, quiet, harmless little thing, who, if she really possessed the sense Lady Trevor attributed to her, might prove a very valuable and worthy friend. But she was certainly not the style of woman to cause any one a heart-ache, or to make a wife rue the day she met her.

And indeed, when, dinner being over,

we joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and I saw her surrounded by my grand-nephews and nieces, who seemed by one accord to have singled her out for persecution, I thought she looked much more like a governess or some one in a dependent situation than the most welcome guest at Durham Hall. Sir Harry seemed pleased with her notice of his children, for he took a seat by her side and entered into conversation with her, the first time that I had seen him pay his wife's friend so open a compliment. Now I watched eagerly for the 'great deal' that by Justina's account was 'in her;' but I was disappointed, for she seemed disinclined for a *tête-à-tête*, and after a few futile attempts to draw her out, I was not surprised to see her host quit his position and wander after Lady Amabel Scott into the back drawing-room, whither my niece's eyes followed him in a restless and uneasy manner.

'I promised to introduce you to Mrs Benson, uncle,' she exclaimed, as she perceived that I was watching her, and willy-nilly, I was taken forcible possession of, and soon found myself occupying the chair left vacant by Sir Harry.

'We can so very seldom persuade Mary

to stay with us ; and when she does come, her visits are so brief that we are obliged to make a great deal of them whilst they last,' was part of Justina's introduction speech ; and on that hint I commenced to speak of the charms of the country and my wonder that Mrs Benson did not oftener take occasion to enjoy them. But barely an answer, far less an idea, could I extract from my niece's valued friend. Mrs Benson's brown eyes were not once raised to meet mine, and the replies which I forced from her lips came in monosyllables. I tried another theme, but with no better success ; and had just decided that she was as stupid as she looked, when, to my great relief, the professor arrived with a message from Lady Trevor, and bore his wife off into another room.

Several days passed without bringing forth much incident. The gentlemen spent most of their time in the shooting-covers or hunting-field, and did not meet the ladies until evening re-assembled them in the drawing-room ; on which occasions I used to get as far as I could from Lady Trevor and the professor's wife, and in consequence generally found myself in the vicinity of Sir Harry and Lady Amabel.

Yet, free and intimate as seemed their intercourse with one another, and narrowly as, in Justina's interest, I watched them, I could perceive nothing in their conduct which was not justified by their relationship, and treated it as a matter of the smallest consequence, until one afternoon about a fortnight after my arrival at Durham Hall.

With the exception of Sir Harry himself, who had business to transact with his bailiff, we had all been out shooting, and as, after a hard day's work, I was toiling up to my bedroom to dress for dinner, I had occasion to pass the study appropriated to the master of the house, and with a sudden desire to give him an account of our sport, incontinently turned the handle of the door. As I did so I heard an exclamation and the rustle of a woman's dress, which were sufficient to make me halt upon the threshold of the half-opened door, and ask if I might enter.

'Come in, by all means,' exclaimed Sir Harry. He was lying back indolently in his arm-chair beside a table strewn with books and papers,—a little flushed, perhaps, but otherwise himself, and, to my astonishment, quite alone. Yet I was

positive that I had heard the unmistakable sound of a woman's dress sweeping the carpet. Involuntarily I glanced around the room; but there was no egress.

Sir Harry caught my look of inquiry, and seemed annoyed. 'What are you staring at, Wilmer?' he demanded, in the curtest tone I had yet heard from him.

'May I not glance round your den?' I replied courteously. 'I have not had the honour of seeing it before.'

Then I entered into a few details with him concerning the day's sport we had enjoyed; but I took care to be brief, for I saw that my presence there displeased him, and I could not get the rustle of that dress out of my mind. As I concluded, and with some remark upon the lateness of the hour, turned to leave the room, a cough sounded from behind a large Indian screen which stood in one corner. It was the faintest, most subdued of coughs, but sufficiently tangible to be sworn to; and as it fell upon my ear I could not help a change of countenance.

'All right!' said my host, with affected nonchalance, as he rose and almost backed me to the door. 'We'll have a talk over all this after dinner, Wilmer; sorry I

wasn't with you; but, as you say, it's late. *Au revoir!*' and simultaneously the study door closed upon me.

I was very much startled and very much shocked. I had not a doubt that I was correct in my surmise that Sir Harry had some visitor in his room whom he had thought it necessary to conceal from me; and though Hope suggested that it might have been his wife, Common Sense rose up to refute so absurd an idea. Added to which, I had not traversed twenty yards after leaving him before I met Justina attired in her walking things, and just returning from a stroll round the garden.

'Is it very late, uncle?' she demanded, with a smile, as we encountered one another. 'I have been out with the children. Have you seen Mary or Lady Amabel? I am afraid they will think I have neglected them shamefully this afternoon.'

I answered her questions indifferently, thinking the while that she had no occasion to blame herself for not having paid sufficient attention to Lady Amabel Scott, for that it was she whom I had surprised *tête-à-tête* with Sir Harry Trevor, I had not a shadow of doubt.

Well, I was not the one to judge them,

nor to bring them to judgment; but I thought very hard things of Sir Harry's cousin during the dressing hour, and pitied my poor niece, who must some day inevitably learn that it was a true instinct which had made her shrink from her beautiful guest. And during the evening which followed my discovery, I turned with disgust from the lightning glances which darted from Lady Amabel's blue eyes, and the arch smile which helped to make them so seductive. I could no longer think her beauty harmless: the red curves of her mouth were cruel serpents in my mind; poisoned arrows flew from her lips; there was no innocence left in look, or word, or action; and I found myself turning with a sensation of relief to gaze at the Quaker-like attire, the downcast eyes, and modest appearance of the professor's wife, whilst I inwardly blamed myself for having ever been so foolish as to be gulled into believing that the flaunting beauty of Lady Amabel Scott was superior to Mrs Benson's quiet graces.

I did not have much to say to Sir Harry Trevor during that evening: indignation for his deception towards Justina made me disinclined to speak to him, whilst he, for

his part, seemed anxious to avoid me. For a few days more all went on as usual : my host's affability soon returned, and every one, my niece included, appeared so smiling and contented, that I almost began to think I must have been mistaken, and that there could have been no real motive for concealing Lady Amabel in Sir Harry's room, except perhaps her own girlish love of fun. I tried to think the best I could of both of them ; and a day came but too soon when I was thankful that I had so tried.

It was about a week after the little incident related above that Sir Harry Trevor was shooting over his preserves, accompanied by his guests. We had had a capital day's sport and an excellent luncheon—at which latter some of the ladies had condescended to join us—and were beating the last cover preparatory to a return to Durham Hall, when the report of a firearm was quickly followed by the news that Sir Harry Trevor had been wounded.

I was separated from him by a couple of fields when I first heard of the accident, but it did not take me long to reach his side, when I perceived, to my horror, that

he was fast bleeding to death, having been shot through the lungs by the discharge of his own gun whilst getting through the hedge. I had seen men die from gunshot wounds received under various circumstances, and I felt sure that Sir Harry's hours were numbered; yet, of course, all that was possible was done at once, and five minutes had not elapsed before messengers were flying in all directions—one for the doctor, another for the carriage, a third for cordials to support the sinking man; whilst I entreated Mr Warden Scott and several others to walk back to the Hall as though nothing particular had happened, and try to prevent the immediate circulation of the full extent of the bad news. Meanwhile, I remained by the wounded man, who evidently suspected, by the sinking within him, that he was dying.

'Wilmer!' he gasped, 'old fellow, have I settled my hash?'

'I trust not, Sir Harry,' I commenced; but I suppose that my eyes contradicted my words.

'Don't say any more,' he replied, with difficulty. 'My head a little higher—thanks. I feel it will soon be over.'

And so he lay for a few moments, sup-

ported on my knee, with his fast glazing eyes turned upward to the December sky, and his breath coming in short, quick jerks.

The men who had remained with me seemed as though they could not endure the sight of his sufferings; one or two gazed at him speechless and almost as pale as himself; but the majority had turned away to hide their feelings.

'Wilmer,' he whispered presently, but in a much fainter voice than before, 'it's coming fast now;' and then, to my surprise, just as I thought he was about to draw his last breath, he suddenly broke into speech that was almost a sob—'Oh, if I could only have seen her again! I wouldn't mind it half so much if I could but have seen Pet again! Call her, Wilmer; in God's name, call her!—call Pet to me—only once again—only once! Pet! Pet! Pet!' And with that name upon his lips, each time uttered in a shorter and fainter voice, and with a wild look of entreaty in his eyes, Sir Harry Trevor let his head drop back heavily upon my knees and died.

When the doctor and the carriage arrived, the only thing left for us to do was

to convey the corpse of its master back to Durham Hall.

For the first few hours I was too much shocked by the suddenness of the blow which had descended on us to have leisure to think of anything else. In one moment the house of feasting had been turned into the house of mourning; and frightened guests were looking into each other's faces, and wondering what would be the correct thing for them to do. Of my poor niece I saw nothing. The medical man had undertaken to break the news of her bereavement to her, and I confess that I was sufficiently cowardly to shrink from encountering the sorrow which I could do nothing to mitigate.

As I passed along the silent corridors (lately so full of mirth and revelry) that evening, I met servants and travelling-cases at every turn, by which I concluded, and rightly, that the Christmas guests were about at once to take their departure; and on rising in the morning, I found that, with the exception of Lady Amabel and Mr Warden Scott, who, as relatives of the deceased, intended to remain until after the funeral, and the professor and Mrs Benson, on whose delicate frame the shock

of Sir Harry's death was said to have had such an effect as to render her unfit for travelling, Durham Hall was clear.

Lady Amabel had wept herself almost dry : her eyes were swollen, her features disfigured, her whole appearance changed from the violence of her grief, and every ten minutes she was ready to burst out afresh.

We had not been together half-an-hour on the following morning before she was sobbing by my side, entreating me to give her every particular of 'poor dear Harry's' death, and to say if there was anything she could do for Justina or the children ; and notwithstanding the repugnance with which her conduct had inspired me, I could not repulse her then. However she had sinned, the crime and its occasion were both past—Sir Harry was laid out ready for his burial, and she was grieving for him.

I am an old man, long past such follies myself, and I hope I am a virtuous man ; but all my virtue could not prevent my pitying Lady Amabel in her distress, and affording her such comfort as was possible. And so (a little curiosity still mingling with my compassion) I related to her in

detail, whilst I narrowly watched her features, the last words which had been spoken by her cousin. But if she guessed for whom that dying entreaty had been urged, she did not betray herself.

'Poor fellow!' was her only remark as she wiped her streaming eyes—'poor dear Harry! Used he to call Justina "Pet?" I never heard him do so.'

Whereupon I decided that Lady Amabel was too politic to be very miserable, and that my pity had been wasted on her.

Of Mrs Benson I saw nothing, but the professor talked about attending the funeral, and therefore I concluded that my niece had invited them, being such intimate friends, to remain for that ceremony.

On the afternoon of the same day I was told that Justina desired to speak to me. I sought the room where she was sitting, with folded hands and darkened windows, with nervous reluctance; but I need not have dreaded a scene, for her grief was too great for outward show, and I found her in a state which appeared to me unnaturally calm.

'Uncle,' she said, after a moment's pause, during which we had silently shaken hands, 'will you take these keys

and go down into—into—his study for me, and bring up the desks and papers which you will find in the escritoire? I do not like to send a servant.'

I took the keys which she extended to me, and, not able to trust myself to answer, kissed her forehead and left the room again. As I turned the handle of the study door I shuddered, the action so vividly recalled to me the first and last occasion upon which I had done so. The afternoon was now far advanced, and dusk was approaching: the blinds of the study windows also were pulled down, which caused the room to appear almost in darkness. As I groped my way toward the escritoire I stumbled over some article lying across my path, something which lay extended on the hearth-rug, and which even by that feeble light I could discern was a prostrated body.

With my mind full of murderous accidents, I rushed to the window and drew up the blind, when to my astonishment I found that the person over whom I had nearly fallen was no other than poor little Mrs Benson, who was lying in a dead faint before the arm-chair. Fainting women not being half so much

in my line as wounded men, I felt quite uncertain in this case how to act, and without considering how the professor's wife had come to be in the study or for what reason, my first impulse was to ring for assistance. But a second thought, which came I know not how or whence, made me lift the fragile, senseless body in my arms and carry it outside the study door into the passage before I called for help, which then I did lustily, and female servants came and bore the poor 'quiet-looking little lady' away to her own apartments and the care of her husband, leaving me free to execute the errand upon which I had been sent. Still, as I collected the desk and papers required by my niece, I could not help reflecting on the circumstance I have related as being a strange one, and could only account for it in my own mind by the probable fact that Mrs Benson had required some book from the late Sir Harry's shelves, and, miscalculating her strength, had left her bedroom with the design of fetching it, and failed before she could accomplish her purpose. I heard several comments made on the occurrence, during the melancholy meal which we now called 'dinner,' by her

husband and Lady Amabel Scott, and they both agreed with me as to the probable reason of it; and as soon as the cloth was removed the professor left us to spend the evening with his wife, who was considered sufficiently ill to require medical attendance.

We were a rather silent trio in the drawing-room—Lady Amabel, Mr Scott, and I—for ordinary occupations seemed forbidden, and every topic harped back to the miserable accident which had left the hall without a master. The servants with lengthened faces, as though attending a funeral, had dumbly proffered us tea and coffee, and we had drunk them without considering whether we required them, so welcome seemed anything to do; and I was seriously considering whether it would appear discourteous in me to leave the hall and return on the day of the funeral, when a circumstance occurred which proved more than sufficiently exciting for all of us.

I had taken the desk, papers, and keys, and delivered them into my niece's hands, and I had ventured at the same time to ask whether it would not be a comfort to her to see Mrs Benson or some

other friend, instead of sitting in utter loneliness and gloom. But Justina had visibly shrunk from the proposal; more than that, she had begged me not to renew it. 'I sent for you, uncle,' she said, 'because I needed help, but don't let any one make it a precedent for trying to see me. I *couldn't* speak to any one: it would drive me mad. Leave me alone: my only relief is in solitude and prayer.'

And so I had left her, feeling that doubtless she was right, and communicating her wishes on the subject to Lady Amabel Scott, who had several times expressed a desire to gain admittance to her widowed cousin.

Judge, then, of our surprise, equal and unmitigated, when, as we sat in the drawing-room that evening, the door silently opened and Justina stood before us! If she had been the ghost of Sir Harry himself risen from the dead, she could hardly have given us a greater start.

'Justina!' I exclaimed, but as she advanced toward us with her eyes riveted on Lady Amabel, I saw that something more than usual was the matter, and drew backward. Justina's countenance was

deadly pale; her dark hair, unbound from the night before, flowed over the white-dressing gown which she had worn all day; and stern and rigid she walked into the midst of our little circle, holding a packet of letters in her hand.

'Amabel Scott,' she hissed rather than said as she fixed a look of perfect hatred on the beautiful face of her dead husband's cousin, 'I have detected you. You made me miserable whilst he was alive—you know it—with your bold looks and your forward manners and your shameless, open attentions; but it is my turn now, and before your husband I will tell you that—'

'Hush, hush, Justina!' I exclaimed, fearful what revelation might not be coming next. 'You are forgetting yourself; this is no time for such explanations. Remember what lies upstairs.'

'Let her go on,' interposed Lady Amabel Scott, with wide-open, astonished eyes; 'I am not afraid. I wish to hear of what she accuses me.'

She had risen from her seat as soon as she understood the purport of the widow's speech, and crossed over to her husband's side; and knowing what I did of her, I

was yet glad to see that Warden Scott threw his arm about her for encouragement and support. She may have been thoughtless and faulty, but she was so young, and *he* was gone. Besides, no man can stand by calmly and see one woman pitted against another.

'Of what do you accuse me?' demanded Lady Amabel, with heightened colour.

'Of what do I accuse you?' almost screamed Justina. 'Of perfidy, of treachery, toward him,' pointing to Mr Warden Scott, 'and toward me. I accuse you of attempting to win my dear husband's affections from me—which you never did, thank God!—and of rendering this home as desolate as it was happy. But you failed—you failed!'

'Where are your proofs?' said the other woman, quietly.

'*There!*' exclaimed my niece, as she threw some four or five letters down upon the table—'there! I brought them for your husband to peruse. *He* kept them; generous and good as he was, *he* would have spared you an open exposure, but I have no such feelings in the matter. Are you to go from this house into another to pursue the same course of action, and per-

haps with better success? No, not if I can prevent it!'

Her jealousy, rage, and grief seemed to have overpowered her; Justina was almost beside herself. I entreated her to retire, but it was of no avail. 'Not till Warden Scott tells me what he thinks of his wife writing those letters with a view to seducing the affections of a married man,' she persisted.

Mr Scott turned the letters over carelessly.

'They are not from my wife,' he quietly replied.

'Do *you* dare to say so?' exclaimed Justina to Lady Amabel.

'Certainly. I never wrote one of them. I have never written a letter to Harry since he was married. I have never had any occasion to do so.'

The widow turned towards me with an ashen-grey face, which it was pitiful to behold.

'Whose are they, then?' she whispered, hoarsely.

'I do not know, my dear,' I replied; 'surely it matters little now. You will be ill if you excite yourself in this manner. Let me conduct you back to your room;' but before I could do so she had fallen in a fit at my feet. Of course, all then was

hurry and confusion, and when I returned to the drawing-room I found Lady Amabel crying in her husband's arms.

'Oh, Warden dear,' she was saying, 'I shall never forgive myself. This all comes of my wretched flirting. It's no good your shaking your head; you know I flirt, and so does every one else; but I never meant anything by it, darling, and I thought all the world knew how much I loved you.'

'Don't be a goose!' replied her husband, as he put her gently away from him; 'but if you think I'm going to let you remain in this house after what that d—d woman— Oh, here is General Wilmer! Well, General, after the very unpleasant manner in which your niece has been entertaining us, you will not be surprised to hear that I shall take my wife away from Durham Hall to-night. When Lady Trevor comes to her senses you will perhaps kindly explain to her the reason of our departure, for nothing under such an insult should have prevented my paying my last respects to the memory of a man who never behaved otherwise than as a gentleman to either of us.'

I apologised for Justina as best I was able, represented that her mind must really

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have become unhinged by her late trouble, and that she would probably be very sorry for what she had said by-and-by; but I was not surprised that my arguments had no avail in inducing Mr Scott to permit his wife to remain at Durham Hall, and in a few hours they had left the house. When they were gone I took up the letters, which still lay upon the table, and examined them. They were addressed to Sir Harry, written evidently in a woman's hand, and teemed with expressions of the warmest affection. I was not surprised that the perusal of them had excited poor Justina's wrathful jealousy. Turning to the signatures, I found that they all concluded with the same words, 'Your loving and faithful Pet.' In a moment my mind had flown back to the dying speech of poor Sir Harry, and had absolved Lady Amabel Scott from all my former suspicions. She was not the woman who had penned these letters; she had not been in the last thoughts of her cousin. Who, then, had been? That was a mystery on which Death had set his seal, perhaps for ever. Before I retired to rest that night I inquired for my poor niece, and heard that she had Mrs Benson with her. I was

glad of that : the women were fond of one another, and Justina, I felt, would pour all her griefs into the sympathising ear of the professor's wife, and derive comfort from weeping over them afresh with her. But after I had got into bed I remembered that I had left the letters lying on the drawing-room table, where they would be liable to be inspected by the servants, and blow the breath of the family scandal far and wide. It was much past midnight, for I had sat up late, and all the household, if not asleep, had retired to their own apartments ; and so, wrapping a dressing-gown about me, and thrusting my feet into slippers, I lighted my candle, and descended noiselessly to the lower apartments. But when I reached the drawing-room the letters were gone : neither on the table nor the ottoman nor the floor were they to be seen ; and so, vexed at my own carelessness, but concluding that the servants, when extinguishing the lights, had perceived and put the papers away in some place of safety, I prepared to return to my own room.

The bedrooms at Durham Hall were situated on either side of a corridor, and fearful of rousing the family or being caught

in *deshabile*, I trod on tiptoe, shading my candle with my hand. It was owing to this circumstance, I suppose, that I had reached the centre of the corridor without causing the least suspicion of my presence; but as I passed by the apartment where the remains of my unfortunate host lay ready for burial, the door suddenly opened and a light appeared upon the threshold. I halted, expecting to see emerge the figure of my widowed niece, but lifting my eyes, to my astonishment I encountered the shrinking, almost terrified, gaze of the professor's wife. Robed in her night-dress, pallid as the corpse which lay within, her large frightened eyes apparently the only living things about her, she stood staring at me as though she had been entranced. Her brown hair floated over her shoulders, her feet were bare; one hand held a lighted candle, the other grasped the packet of letters of which I had been in search. So we stood for a moment regarding one another—I taking in these small but important details; she looking as though she implored my mercy and forbearance. And then I drew back with the gesture of respect due to her sex, and, clad in her white dress, she

swept past me like a startled spirit and disappeared.

I gained my own room, but it was not to sleep. A thousand incidents, insignificant in themselves, but powerful when welded into one, sprang up in my mind to convince me that Justina and I and everybody had been on a wrong tack, and that in the professor's wife, the 'quiet-looking little lady' with her Quaker-like robes, downcast eyes and modest appearance, in the 'best friend' that my niece had ever possessed, I had discovered the writer of those letters, the concealed visitor in Sir Harry's room, the 'Pet' whose name had been the last sound heard to issue from his dying lips. For many hours I lay awake pondering over the best course for me to pursue. I could not bear the thought of undeceiving my poor niece, whose heart had already suffered so much; besides, it seemed like sacrilege to drag to light the secrets of the dead. At the same time I felt that Mrs Benson should receive some hint that her presence in Durham Hall, at that juncture, if desired, was no longer desirable. And the next day, finding she was not likely to accord me an interview, I made the reception of the

missing letters a pretext for demanding one. She came to her room door holding them in her hand, and the marks of trouble were so distinct in her face that I had to summon all my courage to go through the task which I considered my duty.

'You found these in the drawing-room last night?' I said, as I received them from her.

'I did,' she answered, but her voice trembled and her lips were very white. She seemed to know by instinct what was coming.

'And you went to find them because they are your own?' She made no answer. 'Mrs Benson, I know your secret, but I will respect it on one condition—that you leave the Hall as soon as possible. You must be aware that this is no place for you.'

'I never wished to come,' she answered, weeping.

'I can believe it, but for the sake of your friend, of your husband, of yourself, quit it as soon as possible. Here are your letters — you had better burn them. I only wished to ascertain that they were yours.'

'General Wilmer—' she commenced

gaspingly, and then she turned away and could say no more.

'Do you wish to speak to me?' I asked her gently.

'No — nothing; it is useless,' she answered with a tearless, despairing grief which was far more shocking to behold than either Justina's or Lady Amabel's. 'He is gone, and there is nothing left; but thank you for your forbearance—and good-bye.'

So we parted, and to this day, excepting that she is released from all that could annoy or worry her, I have learned nothing more. How long they loved, how much or in what degree of guilt or innocence, I neither know nor have cared to guess at; it is sufficient for me that it was so, and that while Justina was accusing the beautiful Lady Amabel Scott of attempting to win her husband's heart from her, it had been given away long before to the woman whom she termed her dearest friend—to the woman who had apparently no beauty, or wit, or accomplishments with which to steal away a man's love from its rightful owner, but who nevertheless was his 'loving and faithful Pet,' and the last thought upon his dying lips.

Professor and Mrs Benson never returned to Durham Hall. It was not long afterwards that I heard from my niece that his wife's failing health had compelled the professor to go abroad; and to-day she writes me news from Nice that Mrs Benson is dead. Poor Pet! I wonder if those scared brown eyes have lost their frightened look in heaven?

I believe that Justina has made an ample apology for her rudeness to Lady Amabel and Mr Warden Scott. I know I represented that it was her duty to do so, and that she promised it should be done. As for herself, she is gradually recovering from the effects of her bereavement, and finding comfort in the society of her sons and daughters; and perhaps, amongst the surprises which I have already spoken of as likely to await us in another sphere, they will not be least which prove how very soon we have been forgotten by those we left in the world behind us.

CHIT-CHAT FROM ANDALUSIA.

A COUPLE of springs ago, business compelling some friends of mine to cross over into Spain, I gladly accepted the cordial invitation they extended to me to visit with them that 'splendid realm of old romance.'

Our destination was Utrera, a small town situated between Seville and Xeres, and lying in the midst of those vast plains so often mentioned in the *Conquest of Granada.*

I confess that I was rather disappointed to find how hurriedly we passed through

Madrid and Seville, and I longed to be permitted to linger for a little space within their walls; but ours was not entirely a party of pleasure, and a diversion was soon created in my thoughts by our arrival at Utrera, which, from a distance, presented a most Oriental appearance. The houses, many of which are built in the Moorish fashion and dazzlingly white, stand out clearly defined against the deep blue southern sky; the tall tower of Santiago, with little perhaps but its unusual height to recommend it to a stranger's notice, has, nevertheless, an imposing appearance; and even a palm tree, which, solitary and alone, rears its stately head in the centre of the town, puts in its claim for adding in no small degree to the effect of the whole picture. Notwithstanding, with all the combined advantages of white houses, tall towers, solitary palm trees and romantic situations, I would advise no one who is not a traveller at heart or intent upon his worldly profit to fix his residence in this primitive little Andalusian town.

We first took up our quarters at the posada, with the intention of remaining there during our stay, but were soon obliged to abandon the idea, for, though the

best inn in Utrera, it was most uncomfortable, and noisy beyond description.

We began to look about us, therefore, and were soon installed in a small but beautifully clean and cool-looking house in a street leading out of the plaza, and found no reason to be discontented with our abode. It boasted of a pleasant patio (or inner courtyard) and a wide verandah or gallery, into which our rooms opened. As the days grew warmer (and very warm indeed they grew after a while) this patio was our greatest comfort; for, following the example of our neighbours, we had it covered with an awning, and spent the greater part of the day, seated with our books or work, beside its mimic fountain. But if we gained in material comfort by exchanging the noisy and dirty posada for apartments of our own, we had also drawn down upon ourselves the burden of housekeeping, which we found in Spain to be no sinecure. Some friends who had resided a few months in the town, and acquired a fair knowledge of the language, manners, and customs of the natives of Utrera, volunteered to send us a maid, warranted honest and a tolerable proficient in the art of cookery. But she proved a care-full

blessing. To give her her due, she possessed one good quality, and we found by experience that it was about the only one she or her sisterhood could boast of: she was very fond of water. The floors of our new house were formed of stone, partially covered by strips of matting which were easily removed; and we soon lived in a perpetual swamp. Antonia was always both ready and willing to 'clean up,' and never seemed happier than when dashing water in all directions, or brushing away vigorously at the matting with her little short-handled broom.

By the way, I wonder why Spanish women prefer to bend double over their sweeping, instead of adopting our easier method of performing the same operation? In vain did I strive to convince Antonia of the advantages attendant on the use of a broom with a long handle: she only smiled, shook her head, and went obstinately on her weary way.

The water for our own consumption was drawn daily from the Moorish aqueduct just outside the town, and brought to us by the aguador, an old fellow who wore a rusty black velvet turban hat stuck full of cigarettes, besides having one always in

his mouth. He would pour the water from his wooden barrels into a large butt which stood in the kitchen; but as we discovered that he (together with all who felt so inclined) dipped his glass, with the fingers that held it, into the reservoir whenever he wished to quench his thirst, we speedily invested in a filter.

We soon found that it was utterly impossible to infuse any ideas of cookery or housework into the head of the fair Antonia. If we showed her how to lay the tablecloth and place the dishes, she eyed us with surprise, bordering on contempt, that ladies should perform such menial offices; and the next day all our instructions were as though they had never been. It was the same with everything, until we decided that it was far less trouble to wait on ourselves, and our life at Utrera resolved itself into a picnic without an end.

Nevertheless, when we arose one morning to find that Antonia (wearied perhaps of English suggestions) had quietly walked off and left us to shift entirely for ourselves, we felt inclined to think that we had undervalued her. But she had received her wages on the day before, and we learned afterward that under those

circumstances it is a common thing for Spanish servants to quit their places without any warning, and return home for a while to live at their ease on the produce of their labour.

Our next attendant was Pepa, a bright, dark-eyed girl, who always looked so picturesque, with a spray of starry jessamine or scarlet verbena coquettishly placed in her black hair, that it was impossible not to overlook her misdemeanours. She had such an arch way of tossing her head and shaking her long gold earrings that there was no resisting her; and indeed Pepa was but too well aware of the fact herself, and made the best use of her knowledge.

But the dinners were still our *bêtes noirs*, and in these, notwithstanding all her prettiness, she could help us little better than her predecessor. The meat which we procured was simply uneatable, but happily animal food is little needed in those southern climes, and we had plenty of game. Hares, partridges, and wild ducks were most abundant; and a woman used constantly to call on us with live quails for sale, which she would despatch by sticking one of their own feathers into their brains.

Of course, everything was more or less

spoiled which we entrusted to the tender mercies of our handmaid; but fortunately there were no epicures amongst us, and we generally received the goods the gods provided with contentment if not gratitude, and had many resources to turn to in order to eke out a distasteful meal. The bread was excellent, and we always had an abundance of oranges, chestnuts, melons, and pomegranates; so that, under the circumstances, we were not to be pitied.

But one day Pepa, disheartened by her repeated failures, begged to be allowed to serve us a Spanish dinner, after tasting which, she affirmed, we should never desire to eat any other; and having received the permission of her mistress, she set to work, and at the usual hour triumphantly placed the national dish of 'puchero' upon the table. We gathered round it rather doubtfully, but after the first timid trial pronounced it 'not so bad, though rather rich.' It seemed to contain a little of everything—beef, lard, garlic, garbanzos (or small, hard beans), lettuce, pepper, potatoes, and I know not what besides; and the mixture had been kept simmering in an earthenware pot for hours. The next dish served by Pepa was 'gaspacho,'

or a Spanish salad, which is mixed quite differently from an English one, and to most tastes not so palatable. And then she placed before us a large dish of rice, profusely sprinkled with cinnamon, and various small cakes fried in oil; and Pepa's Spanish dinner (which, by the way, was only a sample, I suppose, of the most ordinary national fare) was concluded.

We were thankful that it had been sufficiently good to enable us to praise it enough to give her satisfaction, though we were compelled to adopt more than one ruse in order, without hurting her feelings, to escape having the same feast repeated every day.

There are not many 'lions' in Utrera, but, such as they are, of course we visited them. The principal one perhaps is in the vaults beneath the church of Santiago, but we were scarcely prepared for the ghastly spectacle which met our gaze there. It appears that, many years ago, while digging for some purpose round the church, the workmen found several bodies, which, owing to some peculiar quality of the soil in which they had been buried, were in a wonderful state of preservation; and, by order of the authorities, they were placed

in upright positions against the walls of the church vaults. The old sacristan, who acted as our cicerone, pointed out the bodies to us with his lighted torch, and directed our attention especially to one, evidently that of a very stout woman, which had still a jacket and skirt clinging to it. Strange to say, the bodies were all clothed, although in most cases it had become difficult to distinguish the garments from the remains, for all seemed to partake of the same hue and texture. It is a humbling sight to look upon the dead after they have turned again to their dust, and with but a semblance of the human frame left clinging to them, as though in mockery of our mortality. We could not bear to see the idlers who had followed our party down into the vaults jeering at the appearance of these poor carcases, and touching them in a careless and irreverent manner. Had we had our way, they should all have been tenderly consigned again to the bosom of their mother earth, and we experienced a strange sensation of relief as we turned our backs upon them and emerged once more into the open air.

The principal object of a stroll in Utrera is a visit to the Church of Consolation,

which stands on the outskirts of the town, at the end of a long walk bordered with lines of olive trees. At intervals along the way benches are placed, and here on Sundays and feast-days the inhabitants congregate as they come to and from the church. The latter is an interesting edifice, though its architecture is unpretending enough.

Its nave is lofty, and on the white-washed walls hang hundreds of little waxen and silver limbs, and effigies, with articles of children's clothing and an endless assortment of plaited tails of hair. These are all offerings made to 'Our Lady of Consolation,' in fulfilment of vows or as tokens of thanksgiving for recovery from sickness; and there is something very touching in the idea of these women giving up their most cherished possessions (for every one knows how justly proud the Spanish are of their magnificent hair) as tributes of gratitude to her from whom they have received the favours.

The walls near the western door of the Church of Consolation are hung with innumerable pictures, each bearing so strong a resemblance to the other, both in style and subject, that they might have been drawn by the same hand. As works of

art they are valueless, for even the rules of perspective are ignored in a most comical manner, and with slight variations they all represent the same subject. On one hand is an invalid man, woman or child, as the case may be, and on the other a kneeling figure imploring aid for them of the 'Virgin of Consolation,' who is also portrayed appearing to the suppliant, and encircled by a golden halo. Beneath the painting is inscribed the name of the patient, the nature of his disease, and the date of his recovery.

At the back of the church is a large garden belonging to one of the richest proprietors in the neighbourhood of Utrera, and as the midday heat became more oppressive it was a favourite haunt of ours during the cool of the evening, when the air was laden with the perfume of orange blossoms and other sweet-smelling flowers. The owners of the garden permitted it to grow wild, but that circumstance only enhanced its beauty. The orange trees were laden with golden fruit, of which we were courteously invited to gather as much as we pleased. But our visits to this charming retreat were necessarily short, for, as in most southern lati-

tudes, there was scarcely any twilight in Utrera, and it always seemed as though the ringing of the Angelus were a signal for the nights immediately to set in. But what glorious nights they were! The dingy oil-lamps in the streets (for gas is an innovation which had not yet found its way there) were little needed, as the sky always seemed to be one bright blaze of beautiful stars.

The cemetery at Utrera is a quiet spot, surrounded by a high white wall and thickly planted with cypress trees, which give it a most solemn and melancholy appearance. They have the custom there (I am not sure it is not prevalent in other parts of Spain) of burying the dead in recesses in the walls, which are built expressly of an immense thickness; the coffins are shoved into these large pigeon-holes, and the opening is closed with a marble slab, which bears the inscription usual in such cases, somewhat after the fashion of open-air catacombs. But little respect seemed to be shown to the dead.

One day I met some children bearing a bier, upon which was stretched the corpse of a little girl clothed in white garments, and with a wreath of flowers placed upon

the placid brow. The children, apparently quite unaware of the reverence due to their sacred burden, carelessly laughed and chatted as they bore it along the highway, sometimes sitting down to rest, and then hurrying forward with unseemly haste, as though to make up for lost time. A tall man, wrapped in a huge cloak, and who evidently belonged to the little *cortége*, followed at a distance, but he too performed the duty at his leisure, and seemed to find nothing extraordinary or out of the way in the children's want of decorum.

With the exception of periodical visits to the Church of Consolation before mentioned, the people of Utrera rarely seemed to leave their houses. To walk for the sake of walking is an idea which finds little favour with a Spanish lady, and my friends and myself were looked upon as very strange beings for taking so much exercise and caring to explore the surrounding country.

But to our English taste it was pleasant to stroll up the Cadiz road until we reached a small mound situated thereon, which was belted with shady trees and amply provided with stone seats. This elevation commanded the view of a vast extent of

country, with the grand frowning hills of the Sierra Nevada in the far distance, which the gorgeous sunsets always invested with a strange, unearthly beauty. The intense solitude of the scene, too, was not without its own peculiar charm. At intervals the silence would be broken by the approach of a picturesque-looking peasant bestriding a mule, the silvery jangle of whose bells had been heard in the calm atmosphere for some time before he made his personal appearance. These muleteers never failed to interrupt the monotonous chants they are so fond of singing, to wish us a friendly 'Buenas tardes' ('Good evening') while proceeding on their way, and then we would listen to the sound of the mule's bells and the low rich voice of his master until both died away in the distance, and the scene resumed its normal condition of undisturbed tranquillity.

We made an expedition once, by the new railroad, to Moron, a very old town perched on an almost perpendicular rock and visible for miles distant. The heat was intense, but we toiled manfully up the steep and execrably-paved street from the station, and, weary and footsore, were

thankful to find ourselves within the cool walls of the fine old church. It possesses some valuable Murillos—one of which, representing the head of our Blessed Lord, is especially beautiful. The altar-rails, screen and reredos are all richly gilt, and the sacristan, taking us into the vestry, unlocked several massively carved chests, which disclosed some valuable plate and precious stones; referring to which, he boasted, with pardonable pride, that Utrera could not produce anything half so handsome. And indeed the inhabitants of Moron may well congratulate themselves on these treasures having escaped the grasp of the French during the war, for the sacristan related to us how everything had been hidden away and miraculously preserved from the hands of the spoiler.

But my chit-chat is drawing to a close. It was not without a certain regret that we bade farewell to Utrera, for during the whole of our stay there we had experienced nothing but kindness from all with whom we had come in contact, and the memory of our sojourn in that little out-of-the-way Andalusian town, if not fraught with brilliant recollections, will, at all events

take its rank with that portion of the past which has been too peaceful to rise up again to trouble us. And it were well if we could say the same for every part of our storm-ridden lives.

THE END.

THE SECRET OF ECONOMY.

APPARENTLY, there has been much to say and write lately upon domestic economy. From the time, indeed, that the question of the possibility of marriage upon three hundred a-year was mooted, the subject has never fairly been dropped.

Men with incomes of less than three hundred a-year do not seem to like the idea, that they are bound in consequence to renounce all thoughts of matrimony, and inquiries respecting the matter from aggrieved bachelors are constantly cropping up in those corners of the weekly papers devoted to correspondence. They have even gone so far lately as to suggest, since it seems impossible in this century of riots and rinderpest to curtail one's expenses,

whether it may not be both lawful and feasible to curtail one's family.

The question of, on how much, or on how little, a certain number of persons can exist, is certainly one which affects the mass, but which, to be answered with fairness, must be put individually. There are women and women. What one housekeeper can accomplish on three hundred a-year, another cannot effect on three thousand, for it is not incompatible with many luxuries to possess very little comfort; and comfort is, after all, the essence of domestic felicity.

Yet, it is not fair to lay the whole blame of the impossibility of marriage in these days upon a moderate income, on the extravagance of women, for the difficulty is just as often attributable to the disinclination of men to resign the luxuries to which they have been accustomed. For every really extravagantly disposed female mind there may be found two thriftily disposed ones; and had such minds but been endued with the proper knowledge to carry out their efforts to do well, existence might not be found so difficult a matter as it appears to be at present.

It is true that the 'girl of the period'

(not the *Saturday Reviewer's* 'girl' by any manner of means), is, generally, better dressed and more accustomed to luxury than her mother was before her. But it must be remembered that the expenses of a girl before marriage are regulated by the wishes of her parents, and because they like to see her sail about in the last Parisian fashion, it by no means follows that she will always expect to be dressed the same, or that she will not cheerfully resign some of the luxuries she has been accustomed to, to meet the means of the man who has taken it upon himself to support her.

Apropos of which I have far oftener been called upon to remonstrate with newly-married female friends on their folly in stripping the trousseaux, which had been prepared for them with such care, of all their pretty trimmings of lace and ribbon and embroidery, in order to adorn the little frocks and caps which are scarcely ever noticed but by the mother herself, than to blame them for outrunning their husbands' means in order to procure such vanities.

Various reasons may combine to make the parent, who can afford it, take pleasure in seeing her daughter well dressed. A true mother is naturally proud of a girl's

good looks; and anxious to show them off to the best advantage; or the feeling that her child may not long be with her may make her desirous to please her to the utmost whilst she remains. Of course, the indulgence may arise from lower and more mercenary motives, such as have been attributed for many a long year to the stereotyped 'Belgravian mother;' but even in such a case it does not follow that the girl will never be able contentedly to accommodate herself to a lower range of comfort. It is not to be expected that, single-handed, she should put away from her the luxuries which her parents' income can command; but it remains to be proved whether she will not willingly exchange them to become the mistress of a house of her own, even though it may be smaller than the one to which she has been accustomed. Naturally parents wish to see the children, for whom perhaps they have worked and slaved, comfortably settled in life; and it is folly for men with barely sufficient money to keep themselves to rave against fathers who refuse to sanction their daughters' starving with them.

But the idea as to what constitutes starvation has risen with the times. A little

while ago, it used to be the clergyman with a large family on eighty pounds a-year: a twelvemonth back it rose to the celebrated 'three hundred;' and but a few weeks since I heard a lady gravely affirm that any one who contemplated marriage now-a-days with an income of less than two thousand, must be either a madman or a fool.

Knowing my incompetence for the task, I have no intention in this paper of trying to decide on how small a sum it is possible to maintain a family in this luxurious age. I only wish to say a few words upon what I consider to be the secret of the economy which has need to be exercised in these days in the largest household as well as in the smallest.

The order of her household is a true woman's battle-field, and the better she can manage it, the more comforts she can command, and the more regularity she can enforce upon a small income and with few servants, the greater is the triumph of her victory. If means are unlimited the triumph is lost; and the woman who has a thousand a-year for her housekeeping, and is content to let her husband enjoy no more luxury upon it than his friend who

spends five hundred, allowing the surplus to be wasted for want of a little thought or supervision, is not a true woman or a good one. For if prodigality is not a sin in itself, it arises from the indulgence of a combination of sins, amongst which selfishness holds chief rank.

Take the care of her household out of a woman's hands and what remains for her to do? As a generality she would sit in idleness, for these are not the days when mothers nurse and look after their own children, and, thanks to the sewing-machine, the toil of needlework is over, even in the poorest families.

She would probably take up a novel the first thing in the morning, thereby unfitting herself for any solid work for the remainder of the day; or she would waste her time on fancy-work, or unnecessary letter-writing, or on anything but what sensible people who know they will be called to account hereafter for the use they have made of the brains God has given them would do.

And, as a rule, I believe few women would like to be lightened of their trouble in this respect. The sex is uncommonly fond of a 'little brief authority,' and even

those who have every aid at their command, generally choose to dabble in their housekeeping affairs. And it is just this 'dabbling' which does harm, which often increases the expenses instead of lessening them.

I am not a second Mrs Warren ; I have no ambition to try and teach my sex how to manage their husbands, houses and children on two hundred a-year, by wiping out the bread-pan every morning with a clean cloth ; and making one stick of wood do the duty of two by placing it in the oven to dry the night before.

Mrs Warren's plan of economy is the general one ; or rather, she follows the general idea of what economy consists of, namely, in exercising a constant supervision over servants, and straining every nerve to make the leg of mutton last a day longer than it does with other people. And I for my part believe that the women of England will never know the secret of true economy until they have dropped all such petty interference with the kitchen, and learned to guard their husbands' interests with their *heads* instead of their *eyes*. There is no doubt that in order to be thrifty it is necessary in a great measure to limit one's

expenses, and it is a good plan habitually to ask oneself before completing a purchase, 'Can I do without it?'

In nine cases out of ten debts and difficulties are incurred unnecessarily, for articles which added neither to our respectability nor our comfort, and which, if seriously asked, we should have acknowledged we could have done just as well without. Take the generality of English families, cut off all the superfluities in which they indulge, all the things which are necessary neither to their existence nor their position as gentle-people, and, as a rule, it will be found that such absorb a third at least of their income.

It is not only men who have interested themselves in the questions which have lately sprung up respecting the general rise in prices, and the increasing difficulties which assail the householder. Women are constantly comparing notes with each other; wondering 'where on earth' the money can go to, and lamenting the exorbitant weekly bills they are called upon to pay.

Some have tried to meet their increased expenses by diminishing their number of servants; others by curtailing the kitchen

fare (the worst and most unprofitable species of domestic economy); a few have gone another way to work, and simply tried with how many superfluities they could dispense; and I think these few have succeeded the best.

It was much the fashion a short time back for women to write to the papers complaining of the worthlessness of their servants, and it was not until more than one impertinent letter reflecting on their mistresses had been published from the pens (or the supposed pens) of servants themselves, that the correspondence was perceived to be *infra dig.*, and dropped. We all know that we are very much in the power of our servants, both as regards comfort and economy; and to regulate their actions, we must sway themselves.

As a class, they are much what they have ever been; their characters varying with the authority placed over them. If ignorant, they are bigoted; if educated, presumptuous; they regard their superiors as their natural enemies, and not one in fifty of them is to be entirely trusted. They no longer look upon the house they enter as their home; they think of it more as a boarding-house which they can vacate

at their convenience, and themselves as birds of passage, here to-day and gone to-morrow.

To deal with and to control such minds effectually, it needs to show them that ours is infinitely the superior. If we let them perceive that we have no means of keeping watch over them except we do it personally, we lower ourselves to their level, and fail to gain their respect.

Make your servants admire you; make them wonder at the clearness of your perception, the quickness of your calculations, and the retentiveness of your memory, and inwardly they will acknowledge themselves the inferior, and be afraid to disobey.

You will always hear servants speak with admiration of a mistress who has (to quote their own phraseology) 'eyes in her back;' the fact being that it requires a mind not only educated in the popular sense of the word, but sharpened by friction with the world, to enable one to *perceive* without *seeing;* and that is a state to which the lumpish minds of the mass never attain, and which consequently commands their wonder and respect.

The 'excellent housekeeper' who trots round her kitchen every morning as a rule,

opening each dresser-drawer, and uncovering the soup-tureen and vegetable-dishes, to see that no 'perquisites' are concealed therein, may occasionally light on a piece of unhallowed fat, but she loses a hundredfold what she gains. While she imagines she has made a great discovery, her servants are laughing in their sleeves at her simplicity; for they have a hundred opportunities of concealing to her one of finding, and are doubtless as cunning as herself. And for such a mistress—for one who is for ever prying and trying to find out something—the lower classes have the greatest contempt; they will neither obey nor save for her; they will even go the length of wasting in order to annoy.

But, by this, I have not the least notion of maintaining that the members of that community, of whom I said, but a page before, that not one in fifty is to be trusted, are to be left to do the housekeeping by themselves.

A lady of my acquaintance, married to an extremely obstinate man, was asked how she managed to influence him as she did. 'Because I never let him know I do it,' was the reply. 'I always have my own way, but I make him think my way is his.'

Something of the same sort of management is necessary with servants. Have your own way, but make them imagine that your way is theirs. They are truly but 'children of a larger growth.'

But, in order to do this, you must prove yourself cleverer than they are.

Let no one grumble at the stir which has been made lately regarding the improved education of women, nor that public schools and colleges are being organised for their benefit. If the knowledge thus acquired is never needed for the female doctors, and lawyers, and members of Parliament, which, as fixed institutions, England may never see, it will be only too welcome in domestic life; for the usual style of conducting a woman's education is sadly detrimental to her interests in housekeeping.

What is the use of their being able to play and sing and imperfectly splutter German and Italian, when they are puzzled by the simplest bookkeeping? Hardly a woman of modern times thoroughly understands arithmetic, either mental or otherwise; and many have forgotten, or never properly acquired, even the commonest rules of addition, subtraction, and division.

How is it to be expected then that they are fit to be trusted with money, or having it in their hands to lay it out to the best advantage.

But to return to 'head-economy,' as it should be exercised with regard to servants.

We will suppose that a mistress, desirous of keeping within her allowance without curtailing the real comfort of her husband and children, has asked herself that simple question,—'Can we do without it?' on more than one occasion, and found it answer, in so far that, though several superfluities, such as dessert after dinner, and preserves and cakes for tea have disappeared, all the solid necessaries remain, and the weekly bills are no longer higher than they ought to be. How should she act in order to keep down her expenditure to a settled sum; to be sure that as much, but no more than is needful, is used in the kitchen, the dining-room, and the nursery; and yet to prevent her servants resenting her interference, or exclaiming at her meanness?

It is really very easy, far easier than the other plan, if women would only believe it to be so. It needs no store-room full of

hoarded goods, with the key of which the servants are more familiar than yourself; no stated times for measuring out half-pounds of sugar and dispensing tea by ounces; no running down to the lower regions a dozen times a day to give out what may have been forgotten; or to satisfy oneself whether they really *do* cut the joint at the kitchen supper, or revel in fresh butter when they should be eating salt.

But it does require the knowledge necessary to keep the housekeeping books properly. A thorough acquaintance with the prices of articles, and the different quantities which a household should consume; and above all, to have what is commonly called 'one's wits about one.'

If every tradesman with whom you deal has a running account with you; if nothing in his book is paid for but what you have written down yourself; if your cook has orders to receive no meat without a check; has proper scales for weighing the joints as they come in, and makes a note of any deficiency (the checks being afterwards compared with the butcher's book); it is impossible that the tradespeople can cheat you, and if your money is wasted, you must waste it yourself.

It is an old-fashioned plan to pay one's bills at the end of each week; but it is a very good one. Little things which should be noticed may slip the memory at a longer period. Besides, it is a useful reminder; it shows how the money is going, and if the tradesmen find you are careful, it makes them so.

Following this plan, a quarter of an hour every morning sees the housekeeping affairs settled for the day, leaving the mistress at leisure to pursue her own avocations, and the cook to do her business in the kitchen. It is simply a glance at the larder, and then to write down all that will be required until that time on the morrow; the dinner and breakfast orders on a slate, and the other articles in the books appropriated to them. After a little while it will be found that the labour is purely mechanical; in a quiet family the consumption is so regular that the weekly bills will scarcely vary, and the mistress's eye will detect the least increase, and find out for what it has been incurred.

At the close of each month the debit and credit accounts should be balanced, and then, if the allowance is at any time exceeded, it will generally be proved that

it has gone on the superfluities before mentioned, and not on the actual expense of maintaining the household. When people talk of the difficulties of 'living,' the thoughts of their listeners invariably fly to the cost of bread and meat, and they unite in abusing the tradespeople, who send their children to fashionable schools on the profits which they extort from us. But there are various ways in which men and women can save, besides dispensing with unnecessary eatables.

What woman, for instance, in these days, buying a dress, does not pay twice as much for its being made and trimmed ready for her use as she did for the original material? And who that has feet and fingers, and a sewing-machine, could not sit down and make it in a few hours for herself?

But she will tell you, most likely, that she cannot cut out properly, that she has not the slightest taste for trimming, and that she was not brought up to dressmaking like a dressmaker. Ah, my dear sisters! are not these the days when we should all learn? *Men* may go through life with the knowledge but of one thing—for if they are acquainted with the duties

of their profession, they succeed — but women need to know *everything*, from putting on a poultice to playing the piano; and from being able to hold a conversation with the Lord Chancellor, to clear-starching their husbands' neckties.

I don't say we must *do it*, but I maintain that we should know how.

Men are really needed but in one place, and that is, public life; but we are wanted everywhere. In public and in private, upstairs and downstairs, in the nursery and the drawing-room,—nothing can go on properly without us; and if it does, if our husbands and our servants and our children don't need us, we cannot be doing our duty.

Above all, we have the training of the mistresses of future households, and the mothers of a coming generation — the bringing up, in fact, of the 'girls of the next period.'

If we cannot amend the faults we see in ourselves (an assertion which should be paradoxical to anyone gifted with the least energy), if we think it is too late to sit down in our middle age, and learn to rub the rust off our brains, and to work our heads

with our fingers, we can rear them in a different fashion.

If we are wasteful and extravagant and useless—deserving of all the hard things which have been said of us lately, let us at least take heed that our daughters are not the same.

THE END.

'MOTHER.'

IT was close upon Easter. The long, dark days of Lent, with their melancholy ceremonials, were nearly over, and, as if in recognition of the event, the sun was shining brightly in the heavens. The hawthorn bushes had broken into bloom, and the wild birds were bursting their little throats in gratitude. The boys were almost as wild and joyous as the birds, as they rushed about the playground, knocking each other over in the exuberance of their glee, and forgetting to be angry in the remembrance that the next day would be Holy Thursday, when they should all go home to their fathers and mothers to spend the Easter holidays. I alone of the

merry throng sat apart under the quick-set hedge, joining in neither game nor gaiety, as I wondered, with the dull, unreasoning perception of childhood, why I had been the one selected, out of all that crowd of boys, to have no part in their anticipation or their joy. Even poor, lame Jemmy, who had no remembrance of his father or his mother, and who had been, in a way, adopted by our schoolmaster, and lived all the year round, from January to December, in the same dull house and rooms, looked more cheerful than I did. He was incapacitated by his infirmity from taking part in any of the noisy games that were going on around us, yet he smiled pleasantly as he came limping up towards me on his crutches, and told me that Mrs Murray (who bestowed on him all the mother's care he would ever know) had promised, if he were good, to give him a donkey ride during Easter week, and some seeds to plant in his strip of garden.

'What's the matter with you, Charlie?' he asked presently; 'aren't you glad to be going home?'

'Oh! I don't care,' I answered, listlessly.

'Don't *care* about seeing your father and mother again?'

'I haven't got a mother,' I rejoined, quickly.

'Is your mother dead, like mine? Oh, I *am* sorry! But your father loves you for them both, perhaps.'

'No, he doesn't! He doesn't care a bit about me. He never asks to see me when I do go home; and he frightens me. I wish I might stay all the holidays with Mrs Murray, like you do.'

'That *is* bad,' quoth the lame child. 'Well, maybe they'll forget to send for you, Charlie, and then we'll have fine times together, you and I.'

I had not the same hope, however. I knew that if by any oversight my father forgot to send the servant for me, that my schoolmaster would take the initiative and despatch me home himself.

How I dreaded it. The gloomy, half-closed house, the garden paths, green with damp and thick with weeds, the servants acting entirely upon their own authority, and the master querulous, impatient, and unjust, either shut up in his own room brooding over the past and present, or freely distributing oaths, complaints, and sometimes even blows, amongst the unfortunate inmates of his household. As for

myself, I seldom came within the range of his arm without being terrified away, and it had been a great relief to me when I returned home for the previous Christmas holidays to find that he was absent, and the term of my penance passed peacefully, if nothing else. But now he was at home again, so my master informed me, my father had never dreamt of writing to me, and I looked forward to the coming visit with dread. A strange, unnatural state of things for a child of eight years old, who had never known a mother's love nor care, had never even heard her name mentioned by any one with whom he was connected,

'What was your mother like?' continued Jemmy, after a few minutes' pause, during which we two unfortunates had been ruminating upon our lot. 'Had she light-coloured hair, like Mrs Murray, or dark, like the cook?'

'I don't know,' I answered, sadly. 'I never saw her, that I remember.'

'Haven't you got a likeness of her at home?' he demanded with surprise. 'Wait till I show you mine.'

He fumbled about in his waistcoat, and produced a much faded daguerreotype of

an ordinary-looking young woman in old-fashioned habiliments.

'Isn't she beautiful?' he exclaimed, with weak enthusiasm as he pressed the miniature to his lips.

'Oh, how I wish she hadn't died! I know I should have loved her so much!'

I made no reply. Poor Jemmy's imagination did not run so fast as mine. If my mother had lived to side with my father, where should I have been between them? I turned my face away, and sighed.

It was strange that I had no idea of what my mother had been like. I had never even formed one, neither had I any relation to whose memory I might have appealed on the subject. My father lived a solitary, aimless life in the old neglected house I have alluded to, seldom leaving his own apartments, except at meal times, and certainly never asking any friend to enter them to bear him company. The servants had their parents, or lovers, or brothers, to visit them by stealth in the kitchen, but the master sat by himself, gloomy and preoccupied, and irritable almost to frenzy when provoked. No wonder I wished that I could have spent the Easter holidays with Mrs Murray. But a great surprise

was in store for me. The boys had hardly concluded the game of football they had been carrying on during my colloquy with Jemmy, when Mrs Murray came smiling down the playground in search of me.

'I've a piece of news for you, Master Vere,' she exclaimed. 'Some one is waiting to see you in the parlour.'

'Not papa!' I said, quickly.

'No; not your papa,' replied Mrs Murray, laying her hand compassionately on my shoulder, 'but a new friend —a lady whom you will like very much indeed.'

'A *lady!*' I repeated, in utter bewilderment, whilst my schoolmates crowded round Mrs Murray, with the question, 'Is she come to take Vere home?'

'Perhaps! most probably,' was her answer, whilst exclamations of, 'Oh, I say, that's a jolly shame. It isn't fair. School doesn't break up till to-morrow. *We* sha'n't get off to-day, try as hard as we may,' greeted her supposition from every side, and I, trembling like a culprit, affirmed that I would much rather not be introduced to the pleasures of home one hour earlier than was needful.

'Come into the parlour, dear, and see

the lady,' Mrs Murray replied, 'and we will decide what to do afterwards.'

So my face and hair were hurriedly washed and arranged, and I sheepishly followed my master's wife to the formal little apartment dedicated to the reception of visitors, where we found the lady she had alluded to.

Shall I ever forget her face as she rose to greet me, and drew me into her arms! Such a fair, sweet, fresh face as it was, but with an amount of sorrowful thought pictured in the serious eyes.

'And so this is Charlie Vere,' she said, as she gazed into my features. 'I should have known you anywhere, my darling, from your likeness to your father! And now do you guess who I am?'

'No!' I answered, shyly; for Mrs Murray had slipped away and left me all alone with the stranger.

'I am your mother, dear; your new mother who means to love you very dearly, and I have come to take you home!'

Mother and Home! How sweet the dear familiar words sounded in my ears; familiar alas! to everyone but me. The hawthorn blossoms in the playground seemed to smell sweeter than they had

done before, as she pronounced them, and the birds' chorus rang out harmoniously.

'Will papa be there?' I asked, nervously.

'Papa! of course! What would home be without your father?'

I had found it much pleasanter without him than with him hitherto, but some instinct made me hold my tongue.

'Don't you love papa, dear?' the lady went on softly. 'Don't you think that he loves you?'

'I don't know,' I said, picking my fingers.

'Poor child! Perhaps you have thought not, but that will all be altered now. But you have not yet told me if you will like to have me for a mother!'

'I think I shall like you very much!'

'That's right, so we will go home together and try to make each other happy. You want a mother to look after you, dear child, and I want a little boy to love me. We will not part again, Charlie, now I have found you, not for the present, at all events. You have been too long away from home as it is. That is why I came to-day. I could not wait till to-morrow, even: I was so impatient to see you and to take you home.'

How she dwelt and lingered on the word

and repeated it, as though it gave her as much happiness to listen to as it did me.

'Will *you* be there?' I asked, presently.

'Of course, I shall—always! What would be the use of a mother, Charlie, if she didn't live in the house close to you, always ready to heal your troubles and supply your wants to the utmost of her power?'

'Oh! let us go at once!' I exclaimed, slipping my hand into hers. All dread of my father seemed to have deserted me. The new mother was a guardian angel, under whose protection I felt no fear. She was delighted with my readiness.

'So we will, Charlie! We need not even wait for your box to be packed. Mrs Murray can send on everything to-morrow. And papa will be anxious until he sees us home again!'

My father anxious about me! That was a new thing to be wondered at. I was too much of a baby still to perceive that his anxiety would be for *her*—not for me! I had not yet been able to grasp the idea that she was his wife. I only regarded her as my new mother.

As we passed out of the house, I asked leave to say good-bye to my friend Jemmy.

'His mother is dead, like mine,' I said, in explanation. 'He will be so pleased to hear that I have got a new one.'

'Poor boy!' she sighed; 'we will ask him to spend the summer holidays with you Charlie. A great happiness like ours should make us anxious to make others happier.'

And when Jemmy came forward on his crutches, and smiled his congratulations on the wonderful piece of news I had to give him, she stooped down and kissed his forehead. Then we passed out of the playground together, I clinging to her hand, and proud already to hear the flattering comments passed upon her appearance by the other boys, and to remember that from that time forward she was to be called *my mother*.

. . . . . .

Lilyfields, as my father's house was designated, was not more than ten or twelve miles from the school; but we had to make a little railway journey to reach it, and I thought I had never travelled so pleasantly before. My new mother laughed so often and chatted so continuously to me, that I caught the infection of her mirthful

loquacity, and, long before we got home, had revealed so much of my past life and feelings, that more than once I brought a shadow over her sunny face, and closed her smiling lips with a sigh. But as we left the train and commenced to walk towards Lilyfields, my old fears showed symptoms of returning, and my sudden silence, with the tightening clasp of my hand, did not pass unobserved by my companion.

'What is the matter, Charlie? Of what are you afraid?'

'Won't papa be angry with me for coming back before the holidays begin?' I whispered.

Her clear laugh rang over the peaceful meadows we were traversing.

'If he is angry with any one, he must be so with me, as I fetched you home Charlie.'

'And you are not afraid of him?'

'*Afraid!*' The sweet serious eyes she turned upon me as she ejaculated the word were just about to deprecate so monstrous an idea, when they caught sight of an approaching figure, and danced with a thousand little joys instead.

'There he is!' she exclaimed excitedly.

She ran up to him, dragging me with her.

He took her in his arms (there was not another living soul within sight of us) and embraced her fervently, whilst I stood by, open-mouthed with astonishment.

'My angel,' he murmured, as she lay there, with her face pressed close to his; 'life has been insupportable without you.'

'Ah, Harold! it does me good to hear you say so; and I am so glad to get back to you again. See! here is Charlie waiting for his father to welcome him home.'

She lifted me up in her arms—big boy as I was—and held me towards him for a kiss. How strange it was to feel my father kiss me; but he did so, though I think his eyes never left her face the while. Then he took her hand, and held it close against his heart, and they walked through the silent, balmy-breathed fields together. As I entered the house I could hardly help exclaiming aloud at the marvellous changes that had taken place there. Not an article of furniture had been changed, not a picture moved from its place, yet everything looked bright as the glorious spring. The rooms had been thoroughly cleaned, and lace curtains, snowy table-

cloths, and vases of flowers, with here and there a bright bit of colour in the shape of a rug, or a piece of china, had transformed the house—not into a paradise—but into *a home*. Even my father was changed like his surroundings. He looked ten years younger, as with nicely kept hair, and a becoming velveteen lounging coat, he sunk down into an easy-chair, and deprecated, whilst he viewed with delight, the alacrity with which my new mother insisted upon removing his boots and fetching his slippers. It was such a novelty to both of us to be attended to in any way, that I was as much surprised as he to find that the next thing she did was to take me upstairs, and tidy me for tea herself, showering kisses and love words upon me all the while. Oh! the happy meal that followed. How unlike any we had taken in that house before! I, sitting up at table, with my plate well provided; my father in his arm-chair, looking up with loving eyes at each fresh proof of her solicitude for him, and my new mother seated at the tea-tray, full of smiles and innocent jests, watching us both with the utmost affection; but apparently too excited to eat much herself. Once my father noticed

her want of appetite and reproached her with it.

'I am too happy to eat, Harold!' was her reply.

'Too happy,' he repeated in a low voice, '*really* too happy! No regrets, my Mary, no fears! Your future does not terrify you. You would not undo the past if it were in your power!'

'Not one moment of it, Harold! If I ever think of it, with even a semblance of regret, it is that it did not begin ten years sooner.'

'God bless you!' was all he answered.

If I had not been such a child I should have echoed the words; for before many days were over my head, the whole of my joyous young life was an unuttered blessing upon her. The darkness of fear and despondency—the most unnatural feelings a young child can entertain—had all passed away. I no longer dreaded my father's presence; on the contrary, it was my greatest treat to bear him company as he worked in the garden, or whistled over his carpentering, or accompanied my mother in strolls about the country.

He never shut himself up in his room now, unless she was shut in too; and

although his new-born love was for *her*, and not for me, the glory of it was reflected in his treatment of me.

So I was very happy, and so was he, and so most people would have thought my mother to be. But though she never appeared before my father without a bright face, she was not always so careful in my presence, thinking me, perhaps, too young to observe the changes in her countenance; and sometimes when she and I were alone together, I marked the same look steal over her which I had observed on the occasion of our first meeting—an undercurrent of thoughtful sadness—the look of one who had suffered, who still suffered, from a pain which she kept to herself.

Once I surprised her in tears—a violent storm of tears, which she was powerless for some time to control; and I eagerly inquired the reason of them.

'Mamma, mamma, what is it, mamma? Have you hurt your foot? Did Prince bite you? Have you got a pain anywhere?'

My childish mind could not comprehend that her tears should flow for any other than a physical reason. Did not papa and I love her dearly? and she was afraid of

no one, and she never went to school. What possible cause could she have for tears?

My mother composed herself as soon as she was able, and laid her burning face against my cheek.

'Will my little boy love me always?' she asked—'always — always — whatever happens?'

'Always, dear mamma. Papa and I would die if we hadn't you. Oh, you don't know what it was like before you came here!'

'Then mamma will never again be so silly as to cry,' said my mother, as she busied herself over some occupation to divert her thoughts.

But although this was the only time she betrayed herself so openly before me, I often detected the trace of weeping on her face, which she would try to disguise by excessive mirth.

So the years went on, until one bright summer's day a little sister was born in our house. I hailed the advent of this infant with the greatest possible delight. It was such a new wonderful experience to have a playmate so dependent on me, and yet so entirely my own. I positively wor-

shipped my little sister, although her birth was the signal for my being sent back to school, but this time only as a weekly boarder.

Hitherto my mother had taught me herself, and very sorry I was to give up those delightful lessons, which were rendered so easy by the trouble she took to explain them to me; but her time was too much taken up with her baby to allow her to devote sufficient to me. Besides, I was now eleven years old, growing a great lad, and able to take every advantage of the education afforded me at Mr Murray's school.

My old friend, lame Jemmy, who had spent many a pleasant week at Lilyfields meanwhile, was still there to welcome me back and make me feel less of a stranger; and my father took away the last sting of the new arrangement by buying me a sturdy pony on which to ride backwards and forwards every week to see my mother and him.

But the greatest pang which I experienced was parting, even for a few days, with baby Violet. I cried over her so much, indeed, that I made my mother cry too, as she asked God to bless the boy

who had been a true son to her. I was very glad to think she loved me so much, for I loved her dearly in return ; but as I galloped back to Lilyfields every Saturday afternoon, my thoughts were all for the dimpled baby sister whom I would carry about in my arms, or roll with amongst the newly-mown grass, rather than with those who had proved themselves to be real parents to me,—she from the commencement of her knowledge of me, and he from the date of his knowing her. It was my mother alone I had to bless for it all. But I had grown accustomed to happiness by this time, and took it as my due.

My parents were very proud of their little daughter, who grew into a lovely child, but she did not seem to afford them as much pleasure as pride. Sometimes I detected my mother looking at her as we romped together, with more pain in the expression of her face than anything else. Once she caught her suddenly to her bosom, and kissed her golden curls with passion, exclaiming,—

'Oh, my heart, if I were to go, what would become of you? — what *would* become of you?'

I was still too young to grasp the full

meaning of her words, but I knew my mother meant that if she died, no one would take such good care of Violet as she had done. So I marched up to her confidently, with the assurance that *I* would take that responsibility upon my own shoulders.

'Don't be afraid, mamma! As soon as I am a man, I mean to get a house all to myself, and the best rooms in it shall be for Violet.'

She looked at me with her sweet, earnest, searching gaze for a moment, and then folded me in one embrace with her own child.

'Father's boy!' she murmured, caressingly over me — 'father's brave, loving boy! No, Charlie, I will not be afraid! If it be God's will that I should go, I will trust Violet to father and to you.'

. . . . . .

Meanwhile my father was a very contented man. He had undergone much the same change as myself, and forgotten, in the sunshine that now surrounded him, all the miserable years he had spent in that once desolate mansion.

I do not suppose a happier nor more peaceful family existed than we were. No

jars nor bickering ever disturbed the quiet of the household; everything seemed to go as smoothly as though it had been oiled. We were like the crew of some ship, safely moored within a sunny harbour, never giving a thought to what tempests might be raging outside the bar.

Every Saturday when I rode home on my pony, I found my father either working out of doors if it were summer, or indoors if it were winter, but always with the same satisfied easy smile upon his countenance, as though he had no trouble in the world, as indeed he had not; for my mother warded off the most trifling annoyance from him as though he were a sick child, that must not be upset; whilst she threaded her quiet way through the kitchen and bedrooms, with little Violet clinging to her gown, regulating the household machinery by her own supervision, that no accident might occur to ruffle her husband's temper.

I believed her in those days—I believe her still to be the noblest woman ever planned. One thing alone puzzled me—or rather, I should say, seemed strange to me, for I did not allow it to go the

length of puzzlement—and that was why we had so few visitors at Lilyfields. True, my father had made himself so unsociable in the old days that strangers might well have been shy of intruding themselves upon him now; but my mother was so sweet and gentle, I felt it must be their loss rather than hers, that so few people knew her. When, as a lad of fifteen, I mentioned this circumstance to her, she put it aside as a matter of course.

'When I made up my mind, Charlie, to try as far as in me lay, to render the remainder of your father's life happy, I was perfectly aware that I should have to depend for companionship upon him alone. We have each other, and we have you and Violet. We want no other society but yours.'

Still, I thought the clergyman and his wife might sometimes have come to see us, as they did the rest of their parishioners, and I should have liked an occasional game of play with the sons of Squire Roberts up at the Hall. But, with the exception of the doctor, who sometimes came in for a chat with my father, no one but ourselves ever took a meal at Lilyfields.

As I grew still older, and others remarked on the circumstance in my hearing, I came to the conclusion that my father must have offended his own friends by marrying my mother, whose connections might be inferior to his own. This idea was confirmed in my mind by observing that she occasionally received letters she was anxious to conceal, which, knowing the frankness of her disposition, and her great love for him, appeared very strange to me. One day, indeed, my suspicions became almost certainties. It so happened that my mother had appeared very fidgety and unlike herself at the breakfast-table, and more than once had spoken to Violet and me in a voice hardly to be recognised as her own. We felt instinctively that something was the matter, and were silent, but my father, who was not well, seemed irritated by the unusual annoyance. He wished to remain quietly at home that morning, but my mother found a dozen reasons why he should ride to the neighbouring town and take me with him. He combatted her wish for some time, till, finding that her arguments were revolving themselves into entreaty, his affection conquered his irresolution, and we set off

together. It was not a genial day for a ride, and the trifling commissions my mother had given us to execute were not of sufficient consequence to turn the duty into a pleasure. I was rather pleased than otherwise, therefore, when we had left Lilyfields some miles behind us, to find that my pony had cast a shoe, and to be able, according to my father's direction, to turn back and walk it gently home again, whilst he went forward to do my mother's bidding.

When I reached Lilyfields I left the animal in the stables, and, walking up to the house, gained the hall before anyone was sensible of my approach. What was my surprise to hear a loud altercation going on within the parlour. My first impulse was to open the door; but as my mother turned and saw me standing on the threshold, she came forward and pushed me back into the hall.

'Go away!' she whispered hurriedly; 'go upstairs; hide yourself somewhere, and do not come down until I call you!'

Her eyes were bright as though with fever, and a scarlet spot burned on either cheek. I saw she was labouring under the influence of some strong excitement,

and I became intensely curious to learn the reason.

'Whom have you in there?' I demanded, for I had caught sight of another figure in the drawing-room.

'Oh! you wish to know who I am, young man, do you?' exclaimed a coarse, uncertain voice from the other side the half-opened door. 'Well, I'm not ashamed of myself, as *some* people ought to be, and you're quite welcome to a sight of me if it'll give you any pleasure.'

The door was simultaneously pulled open, and a woman stood before me.

How shall I describe her.

She may have been beautiful, perhaps, in the days long past, but all trace of beauty was lost in the red, blotchy, inflamed countenance she presented to my gaze. Her eyes were bloodshot; her hair dishevelled; her dress tawdry and untidy, and if she had even been a gentlewoman, which I doubted, she had parted with every sign of her breeding. As she pushed her way up behind my mother—looking so sad and sweet and ladylike beside her—she inspired me with nothing but abhorrence.

'Who is this person?' I repeated, with

an intimation of disgust that apparently offended the stranger, for in a shrill voice she commenced some explanation which my mother was evidently most anxious I should not hear.

'Oh, Charlie! do you love me?' she whispered.

'Mother! yes!'

'Then go up to your room, now, *at once*, and wait there till I come to you! I will speak to you afterwards—I will tell you *all*—only go now!'

She spoke so earnestly that I could not refuse her request, but did as she desired me at once, the woman I had seen, screaming some unintelligible sentence after me as I ascended the stairs. But when I found myself alone, the scene I had witnessed recurred rather unpleasantly to my memory. It was an extraordinary circumstance to see a stranger at all within our walls; still more so a woman, and one who dared to address my mother in loud and reproachful tones. And I was now sixteen, able and willing to defend her against insult, why, therefore, had she not claimed my services to turn this woman from the house, instead of sending me upstairs, as she might have done little

Violet, until she had settled the matter for herself? But then I remembered the trouble my mother had taken to get my father and me away from Lilyfields that morning, and could not believe but that she had foreseen this visitation and prepared against it. It was then as I had often supposed. She had relations of whom she was ashamed, with whom she did not wish my father to come in contact. Poor mother! If this was one of them, I pitied her! I believed the story I had created myself so much, that I accepted it without further proof, and when my mother entered the room, and laying her head against my shoulder, sobbed as if her heart would break, I soothed her as well as I was able, without another inquiry as to the identity of the person with whom I had found her.

'Don't tell your father, Charlie!' she said, in parting. 'Don't mention a word to anyone of what you have seen today. Promise me, darling! I shall not be happy till I have your word for it!'

And I gave her my word, and thought none the less of her for the secrecy, although I regretted it need be.

Not long after this my father articled

me, at my own request, to an architect in London, and my visits to the happy home at Lilyfields became few and far between. But I had the consolation of knowing that all went well there, and that I was taking my place in the world as a man should do.

I had worked steadily at my profession for two years, and was just considering whether I had not earned the right to take a real good long holiday at Lilyfields (where Violet, now a fine girl of seven years old, was still my favourite plaything), when I received a letter from the doctor of the village—desiring me to come home at once as my father was ill, beyond hope of recovery. I knew what that meant—that he was already gone; and when I arrived at Lilyfields I found it to be true; he had died of an attack of the heart after a couple of hours' illness. The shock to me was very great. I had never loved my father as I did my mother; the old childish recollections had been too strong for that, but the last few years he had permitted me to be very happy, and I knew that to *her* his loss must be irreparable. Not that she exhibited any violent demonstration of grief.

When I first saw her, I was surprised at her calmness. She sat beside my father's body, day and night, without shedding a tear; and she spoke of his departure as quietly as though he had only gone on a journey from which she fully expected him to return. But though her eyes were dry, they never closed in sleep, and every morsel of colour seemed to have been blanched out of her face and hands. So the first day passed, and when the second dawned, I, having attained the dignity of eighteen years, thought it behoved me to speak of my late father's affairs and my mother's future.

'Where is father's will, mother?'

'He never made one, dear!'

'Never made a will! That was awfully careless.'

'Hush, Charlie!'

She would not brook the slightest censure cast on her dead love.

'But there *must* be a will, mother.'

'Darling, there is none! It was the one thought that disturbed his last moments. But I am content to let things be settled as they may.'

'Lilyfields will be yours of course, and everything in it,' I answered decidedly.

'No one has a better right to them than you have. And you and Violet will live here to your lives' end, won't you?'

'Don't ask me, dear Charlie, don't think of it—not just yet at least! Let us wait until—until—it is all over, and then decide what is best to be done!'

Before it was all over; matters were decided for us.

It was the day before the funeral. I had just gone through the mournful ceremony of seeing my father's coffin soldered down, and, sad and dispirited, had retired to my own room for a little rest, when I heard the sound of carriage wheels up on the gravel drive. I peered over the window blind curiously, for I had never heard of my father's relations, and had been unable in consequence to communicate with any of them. A lumbering hired fly, laden with luggage, stopped before the door, and from it descended, to my astonishment, the same woman with the fiery red face whom I had discovered in my mother's company two years before. I decided at once that, whatever the claims of this stranger might be, she could not be suffered to disturb the widow in the first agony of her crushing grief, and, quick, as thought, I ran down

into the hall and confronted her before she had entered the house.

'I beg your pardon, madam,' I commenced, 'but Mrs Vere is unable to see anyone at present. There has been a great calamity in the family, and—'

'I know all about your calamity,' she interrupted me rudely 'if it were not for that I shouldn't be here.'

'But you cannot see Mrs Vere!' I repeated.

'And pray who *is* Mrs Vere?' said the woman.

'My mother,' I replied proudly, 'and I will not allow her to be annoyed or disturbed.'

'Oh! indeed, young man. It strikes me you take a great deal of authority upon yourself; but as I mean to be mistress in my own house, the sooner you stop that sort of thing the better! Here! some of you women!' she continued, addressing the servants who had come up from the kitchen to learn the cause of the unusual disturbance. 'Just help the flyman up with my boxes, will you—and look sharp about it.'

I was thunderstruck at her audacity.

For a moment I did not know what to answer. But when this atrocious woman walked past me into the parlour, and threw herself into my dead father's chair, I followed her, and felt compelled to speak.

'I do not understand what you mean by talking in this way,' I said. 'Mrs Vere is the only mistress in this house, and—'

'Well, young man, and suppose *I* am Mrs Vere!'

'I can suppose no such thing. You cannot know what you are talking about. My mother—'

'*Your mother!* And pray, what may your name be and your age?'

'Charles Vere; and I was eighteen last birthday,' I said, feeling compelled, I knew not by what secret agency, to reply.

'Just so! I thought as much! Well, I am Mrs Vere, and I am your mother!'

'*My mother!* You must be mad, or drunk! How dare you insult the dead man in his coffin upstairs. My mother! Why, she died years ago, before I can remember.'

'Did she? That's the fine tale, Ma-

dam, who's been taking my place here all this time, has told you, I suppose. But I'll be even with her yet. I'm your father's widow, and all he's left behind him belongs to me, and she'll be out of this house before another hour's over her head, or my name's not Jane Vere!'

'You lie!' I exclaimed passionately. This tipsy, dissipated, coarse-looking creature, the woman who bore me, and whom I had believed to be lying in her grave for sixteen years and more. Was it wonderful that at the first blush my mind utterly refused to credit it? The angry accusation I have recorded had barely left my lips, when I looked up and saw *my mother* —the woman who had come as an angel of light into my father's darkened home, and watched over me with the tenderest affection since—standing on the threshold, pale and peaceful in her mourning garb, as the Spirit of Death itself.

'Mother! say it is not true,' I cried as I turned towards her.

'Oh, Charlie, my darling boy! my brave, good son! Be quiet! bear it like a man; but it *is* true!'

'This—this woman was my father's *wife!*'

'She was!'

'And *you*, mother!' I exclaimed in agony.

'I was only the woman that he loved, Charlie,' she answered, with downcast eyes. 'You must think no higher of me than that!'

'I think the very highest of you that I can. You were my father's loving companion and friend for years: you saved his life and his reason! You were *his* true, true wife, and *my* mother. I shall never think of you in any lower light.'

My emotion had found vent in tears by that time. It was all so new and so horrible to believe, and my mother's hand rested fondly on my bowed head.

Then that other woman, whose existence I can never recall without a shudder, seized her hateful opportunity, and levelled the most virulent abuse at my poor martyr mother's head. Words, such as I had never heard from a female before, rained thickly from her lips, until I lost sight of my own grief in my indignation at the shower of inuendoes which were being hurled at the person dearest to me of all the world.

'Be silent,' I said in a loud authoritative

voice. 'Were you twenty times my mother I would not permit you to speak as you are speaking now. If it is true that you were my father's wife, why were you not in your proper place, instead of leaving your lawful duties to another?'

'Oh! madam here can answer that question better than myself. She knows well enough there was no room left for me where she was''

'Untrue!' murmured my mother, but without any anger. 'I would have shielded your character from your boy's censure, as I have done for so long, but justice to the dead compels me to speak. You left this home desolate for many miserable years before I entered it. You deserted your child in his infancy, but your husband had so good and forgiving a heart that, when you cried to him for pardon, he took you back again and condoned your great offence, and therefore, when you left him a second time, the law contained no remedy for his wrong. He was compelled to live on—alone—dishonoured and comfortless, whilst you—you can best tell your son what your life has been since.'

'Anyway I am Mrs Vere,' retorted the other, 'and my husband has died intestate,

and his property belongs to me, so I'll thank you to take your brat, and clear out of my house before the sun goes down.'

'Oh! mother, this is infamous! It can never be!'

'It *must* be, Charlie! It is the law. I knew all this when I consented to come here as your father's wife. He never deceived me for a single moment; and if I have any regret that he put off providing against this contingency until it was too late, it is only for fear lest he should be regretting it also. 'But, my dear, *dear* love!' she added in a lower tone, 'I acquit you of this as of all things. I know your great love for me never failed, and I am content!'

'I will not believe it without further proof!' I exclaimed. 'I will send Ellen at once for the solicitor. I cannot leave you alone with this horrid woman!'

'Hush, Charlie! she is your mother.'

'I will not acknowledge it. *You* are the only mother I have ever had—the only mother I ever will have to my life's end.'

Mr Chorberry, the solicitor, came without delay, but he could give me no com-

fort. My poor father, by that strange indifference which has been the curse of so many, had put off making his will until it was too late, by reason of which he had left the one to whom he owed most in the world, the woman who had sacrificed friends and reputation to spend her life in a dull country home, administering to his pleasures, entirely dependent on her own resources for support—whilst the faithless, drunken creature he had the misfortune to be still chained to, walked in as the lawful wife, and claimed her share of the property. There was only one drop of balm in his decision. I, as my father's son, shared what he had left behind him, but my angel mother and dear baby-sister were cast upon the world to shift for themselves.

And this was the law.

Oh, father! did your spirit look down from whichever sphere it had been translated to, and witness this?

'But, surely,' I said to Chorberry, 'there can be no necessity for my mother leaving Lilyfields before the funeral?'

'Of course there is no necessity; but do you think it advisable, under the circumstances, that she should remain? Mrs Vere has the legal power to enforce her de-

parture, and I am afraid will not be slow to use it.'

My mother evidently was of one mind with him, for in an incredibly short space of time she had packed her belongings. Mrs Vere, standing over her meanwhile to see she did not purloin anything from the house, and was waiting in the hall with little Violet, ready to go to the house of the clergyman's wife, who, to her honour, having heard how matters stood at Lilyfields, had promptly sent my mother an invitation to the vicarage for the night.

'Are you ready, dear mother?' I said sadly, as I joined her in the hall, and drew her arm within my own.

'Well, Mr Charles, I suppose I shall see you back again here before long?' screamed the shrill voice of Mrs Vere down the staircase.

I started.

See me back! Was it possible that this woman believed I intended to make friends with her?

'We've been parted long enough, it strikes me,' she continued; 'and now your father's gone, and left no one behind him but yourself, I suppose you'll be looking out for my share of the property at my death,

so we may as well let bye-gones be bye-gones—eh?'

'I wish for none of your property, madam,' I answered haughtily, 'since the law gives it to you you are welcome to keep it.'

'Charlie, dear, think what you may be resigning,' urged my mother in my ear.

'I think of nothing but *you*, mother!'

'Hoity, toity! here's manners,' cried the other woman. 'You seem to forget, Master Charlie, that *I'm your mother!*'

Still holding my mother's hand, I turned and confronted her.

'I forget nothing, madam! I wish I could; but I remember that *here* stands the woman who laboured where you refused to work; who loved, where you had insulted and betrayed; who was faithful where you were faithless and undeserving; and, I say, that here stands my dead father's true wife; and here stands, in God's sight, *my mother!* The blessing of man may not have sanctified her union, but the blessing of heaven shall be upon it and upon her—upon the creatures she rescued from a living death and upon the gracious hand with which she did it, until time itself shall be no more.

So saying, I passed with *my mother* be-

yond the gates of Lilyfields, to make a new life for her in some quiet spot where she might outlive her grief, and to repay, if possible, by the protection and support of my manhood, the love she had given me as a little child.

THE END.

IN THE HEART OF THE ARDENNES.

FEVER is raging in Brussels, and we are advised to quit the town as soon as possible. The question is, where to go. I suggest Rochefort in the Ardennes, having ascertained previously that the place is healthy; but my friends laugh at me. 'Rochefort in February! We shall all be frozen to death.' 'At least,' I argue, 'there is pure air to breathe.' 'But you can have no idea of the dulness,' is all the reply I receive; 'Rochefort, with its one street and its one resident is bad enough in the

summer, but at this season it will be unendurable.' Yet I am not to be turned from my purpose. I consider it is better to be frozen outwardly than burned inwardly; and that when one is flying from a pestilence, there is no time to regret the numerous pleasures left behind, or the few that loom in the future. And so we settle finally that, notwithstanding its promised disadvantages, we will thankfully accept the refuge Rochefort can afford us; and having made up our minds to go, we start twenty-four hours afterwards.

Being pent-up in a railway carriage with half-a-dozen manikins and womanikins, who suck oranges half the time, and obtrude their little persons between your view and the window the other half, is not perhaps the most favourable situation from which to contemplate the beauties of nature; for which reason, perhaps, it is as well that for the first part of our journey nature presents no beauties for our contemplation, and thereby our naturally mild tempers are prevented from

boiling over. But when we have accomplished about fifty miles (Rochefort being distant from Brussels seventy miles) the country begins to assume a different and far more engaging aspect. The flat table-land, much of it marshy and undrained, which has scarcely been varied hitherto, gives place to swelling hills, half rock, half heather, and charming copses of fir, some of which are very extensive. The scenery becomes altogether more wooded and naturally fertile-looking; and houses and farmsteads lose all trace of British contiguity, and become proportionately interesting to curious English eyes. The train is an express, and as it dashes past the fragile, roughly-built little stations with which the road is bordered, it is amusing, or rather I should say it would be amusing, did it not suggest the idea of accidents, to see the signal-flags displayed by peasant-women in every variety of attitude and costume.

Here stands a stolid, solid Belgian girl, of eighteen years of age probably, and stout enough for forty, with a waist like

a tar-barrel, and legs to match, who nurses her flag as if it were a baby, and gazes at the flying train with a countenance which could not be more impassive were it carved in wood. We have hardly finished laughing at her, when the train rushes past another station, at which appears a withered old crone, her head tied up in a coloured handkerchief, and her petticoats, cut up to her knees, looking cruelly short for such a wintry day, and displaying a pair of attenuated legs and feet for which the huge wooden *sabots* look miles too large. She waves about the signal-flag in a nervous, agitated manner, which suggests the idea that she is not quite sure whether she has caught up the right one or not; but before we have time to be made uncomfortable by the fact, we are passing another of these Belgic 'shanties,' at the door of which appears for a moment a middle-aged woman, who waves the signal at us in a menacing manner, and rushes back immediately to her children or her cooking.

Remembering our own signalmen, and

the importance attached to their capabilities and education for the important office assigned them, it ceases to be a matter of amusement to see the lives of hundreds daily intrusted to the direction of such ignorant creatures as these. I suppose that 'Monsieur,' smoking at his ease by the fireside in the little wooden station-house, directs the actions of his mother, wife, or daughter; but what are the authorities about not to insist on his performing his duty himself?

Notwithstanding all which, however, our train reaches Jemelle (the nearest station to Rochefort) in safety, and in the midst of a wind sufficient, if not to take our heads, to take our hats off, we and our belongings come to the ground. It takes some minutes to get our nine packages together; and when we present ourselves at the door of the diligence, it is nearly full. I look despairingly at the nurse and all the children, and decide that the younger members of the family must go by diligence, and the elder shall walk with me to Rochefort. But the Rochefortians are too polite to permit

such a thing. Two of them insist upon getting out and giving up their places to the children. I protest against such a proceeding, of course, as in duty bound, but they will hear of no excuse, and start off walking at such a pace that they are out of sight before the diligence is set in motion. At last the luggage is all packed away on the top, and we are all packed away inside, in company with two gentlemen, who open the conversation pleasantly by asking us where we come from, and telling us that we must not expect to find Rochefort as large as Brussels, which, to say truth, we had scarcely anticipated. The talk becomes fragmentary, for the diligence rattles and jolts over the stony, hilly road, and the bells on the horses' collars jangle in unison ; and the baby is so enchanted with the noise, that he shouts till no one can be heard but himself. But twenty minutes' purgatory brings us into a long, steep, narrow street, paved with stones, and bordered with grey-and-white houses ; and I have hardly time to ask, 'Is this Rochefort?' when the diligence draws up before a whitewashed

house with a sign swinging before the door, and I am asked if we are for the Hôtel Biron. No, we are for the Hôtel de la Cloche d'Or ; and as no one seems to be for the Hôtel Biron, the diligence continues to climb the stony street until it reaches the summit, and halts before the Hôtel de la Cloche d'Or.

Here we all unpack ourselves ; and a buxom German landlady, with a kind, motherly face, comes down the steps to greet us. She has received my letter ; the beds are all ready for us ; the dinner will be on the table in half-an-hour ; we are to be pleased to enter, and make ourselves at home. We *are* very pleased ; for we are dreadfully tired (not cold, for the weather is unnaturally mild), and have not had anything substantial to eat all the day. We climb up the steps of the hotel, which looks just like a farmhouse abutting on the main street, and find ourselves in a sanded room, containing a long wooden table, with benches either side of it, and bearing evident reminiscences of smoking and drinking —in fact, 'not to put too fine a point on it,' the public tap-room—but where we are met

by the landlady's two eldest daughters, Thérèse and Josephine, who are beaming in their welcome. They usher us into a second room, where the children scream at the sight of a table laid for dinner, and the four corners of which bear bowls of whipped cream and custard, and rosy Ardennes apples, and biscuits just out of the oven. The little people want to begin at once, and cannot be brought to see the necessity of washing their faces and hands first, or waiting till the meat and potatoes shall be placed upon the table. Would Madame like to see the *chambres-à-coucher* at once? Madame saying yes, Thérèse catches up the youngest child but one, and, preceded by Josephine, we enter first a scullery, next a bricked passage, thence mount a most perilous set of dark narrow stairs, and stumble into a long whitewashed corridor, which terminates in a glass-door opening on to a garden. Here three doors successively thrown open introduce us to our bedrooms; and the trunks having been brought up the breakneck stairs, we take possession at once. The little white-cur-

tained beds are small, but beautifully clean, and each one is surmounted by its eider-down quilt in a coloured cotton case. Two little islands of carpet in a sea of painted boards represent the coverings of the floors; and the washing-stands are only deal-tables, and there are no chests of drawers; but we inhale the fresh, vigorous breeze which is pouring through the windows (open even at that season), and think of fever-infected Brussels, and are content. But though it is all very nice and clean, we cannot possibly wash without water, nor dry our hands without towels.

An imbecile shout from the door for anybody or anything brings a broad-featured, rosy, grinning German girl to our aid, who, when she is asked her name, says it is Katrine, but we can call her by any name we please. The pronunciation of 'Katrine' not presenting those difficulties to our foreign tongues which the owner of it seems to anticipate, we prefer to adhere to her baptismal cognomen, instead of naming her afresh, and desire Katrine to bring us some hot water and towels; on

which she disappears, still on the broad grin, and returns with a pail of warm water, which she sets down in the middle of the room. We manage well enough with that, however, but are at our wits' end when, on being asked for more of the same fluid with which to mix the baby's bottle, she presents it to us in a washing-basin. But as, a few minutes after, I encounter her in the corridor carrying a coffee-pot full to E—'s room, I conclude that in Rochefort it is the fashion to use vessels indiscriminately, and resolve thenceforth to take the goods the gods provide, without questioning.

On descending to the dining-room, we find that the gods have been very munificent in their gifts. After the soup appears roast beef; and as we are very hungry, we cause it to look foolish, and are just congratulating each other on having made an excellent dinner, when in trots Thérèse, pops our dirty knives and forks upon the table-cloth, whips away our plates, with that which contains the remainder of the beef, and puts down a dish of mutton-chops in its

stead. We look at one another in despair; we feel it to be perfectly impossible to begin again upon mutton-chops, and I am obliged to hint the same to Thérèse in the most delicate manner in the world. She expostulates; but to no purpose, and leaves the room, mutton-chops in hand. But only to give place to her mother, who enters with a countenance of dismay to inquire what is wrong with the cooking that we cannot eat.

Nothing is wrong; we have eaten remarkably well. It is our capabilities of stowage which are at fault. Will we not have the hare, which is just ready to be served up?

Sorry as we are to do it, we must decline the hare; and as we affirm that we are ready for the pudding, and nothing else, we feel we have sunk in Madame's estimation.

The pudding, a *compote* of apples and preserves, with the whipped cream and custard, is delicious; and as soon as we have discussed it, we are very thankful to stretch ourselves under the eider-down quilts, and know the day to be over. We

have done work enough that day to entitle us to twelve hours' repose ; yet we are all wide-awake with the first beams of the morning sun.

We dress ourselves with the pleasurable anticipation of seeing new things, however simple, and come down-stairs to a breakfast-table, in its way as plentifully spread as the dinner-table of the night before. We have an abundance of milk,—so fresh from the cow that it is covered with froth, and the jug which contains it is quite warm,—eggs, cold meat, home-made bread in huge brown loaves, good butter, and strong clear coffee. In fact, we come to the conclusion that our landlady knows how to live, and we no longer marvel at the rosy cheeks and full forms of Thérèse and Josephine, nor that Madame herself fills out her dresses in such a magnificent manner.

E— has been for a stroll before breakfast, and brings back a report of ruins on the high ground ; he has already unpacked his sketch-books and sharpened his pencils. We, not being walking encyclopædias, seize our *Continental Bradshaw*, and find

that the ruins are those of a castle in which Lafayette was made prisoner by the Austrians in 1792.

As soon as breakfast is concluded, we rush off to see the ruined castle, which stands on an eminence just above the hotel, and which our landlady (who walks into our sitting-room and takes a chair in the most confiding manner possible whenever she feels so inclined) informs us, although not open to the public, belongs to a lady whose house is built on the same ground, and who will doubtless allow us to look over it. We can see the remains of the castle before we reach them, and decide that it must have been uglier and less interesting when whole than now, having been evidently designed with a view to strength rather than beauty. The little winding acclivitous path which leads to it, bounded by a low wall fringed with ferns and mosses, is perhaps the prettiest part of the whole concern ; but just as we have scaled it, and come upon the private dwelling-house, our poetic meditations are interrupted by the onslaught of half-a-dozen dogs (one of which

is loose, and makes fierce snaps at our unprotected legs), which rush out of their kennels at chains' length, and bark so vociferously, that we feel we have no need to make our presence known by knocking at the door. A child appears at it; and we inquire politely if we may see the ruins, at which she shakes her head, and we imagine she doesn't understand our Parisian French.

But in another moment we are undeceived, for the shrill, vixenish voice of a woman (may dogs dance upon her grave!) exclaims sharply from the open door, '*Fermez, fermez; on ne peut pas entrer.*' The child obediently claps it to in our faces, and we retrace our steps, with a conviction that the lady is like her castle—more strong than beautiful. E— is so disgusted that he will not even sketch the ruins from the opposite side of the road, up which another precipitous path leads us to a long walk, which in summer must be a perfect bower, from the interlacing of the branches of the trees with which it is bordered; and from which we have a far better view of the ruins

than the utmost politeness of their owner could have afforded us. But no ; judgment has gone out against them ; we decide they are heavy and unpicturesque, and not worth the trouble ; and we walk on in hopes of finding something better: and are rewarded. At the close of the long over-shadowed walk, a quaint little chapel, beside which stands a painted wooden crucifix nearly the size of life, excites our curiosity, and, walking round it, we come upon one of the loveliest scenes, even in the month of February, that Nature ever produced.

A green valley, creeping in sinuous folds between two ranges of high hills ; one rocky and coated with heather, the other clothed with wood. Beneath the rocky range there winds a road bordered by trees, —along which we can see the red diligence which brought us from the station taking its jangling way,—and beside it runs a stream, terminating in a cascade and a bridge, and the commencement of the lower part of Rochefort. All the fields are cut upon the sides of hills, and are diversified by clumps of rock covered with ferns,

and usually the groundwork of a well, protected by a few rough planks, or the fountain-head of a mountain-stream which trickles down until it joins the river. This is the valley of Jemelle, to see which in the proper season would alone be worth a journey to Rochefort. We look and admire, and lament the impossibility of ever transferring such a scene to canvas as it should be done; and then we turn back whence we came, and find we are standing at the entrance of an artificial cave, situated at the back of the crucifix before alluded to, and which forms perhaps as great a contrast to the natural loveliness we have just looked upon, as could well be. Apparently it is the tomb of some woman, by the framed requests which hang on either side that prayers may be offered for the repose of her soul; but had her friends turned out upon her grave all the maimed and motley rubbish to be found in a nursery playbox of some years' standing, they could scarcely have decorated it in a less seemly manner. At the end of the cave is a wooden grating, behind which is exhibited

one of those tawdry assemblages of horrors which tend more perhaps than all else to bring ridicule on the Roman Catholic religion, so utterly opposed are they to our conceived ideas of what is sacred. Two or three rudely-carved and coarsely-painted, almost grotesque, wooden groups of the dead Christ, the Holy Family, and the Crucifixion, form the groundwork of this exhibition: the interstices being filled up with gold-and-white jars of dirty artificial flowers; framed prints of saints with lace borders, reminding one of the worst description of valentines; and composite figures, supposed to represent the same individuals, and which may have cost fifty centimes apiece. The collection is such as to make the spectator shudder to see holy things so unholily treated; and it is difficult to conceive how, in this century, when art has been carried to such a pitch that even our commonest jugs and basons have assumed forms consistent with it, anyone, even the lowest, can be satisfied with such designs and colouring as these things display.

Returning homeward by the lower part of the town, we pass a *maison religieuse* dedicated to St Joseph, and in the garden see the good little sisters joining their pupils, to the number of forty or fifty, in a merry game of 'Here we go round the mulberry-bush,' and apparently taking as much pleasure in the exercise as the youngest there. The church and churchyard stand at this end of Rochefort. There is nothing in the building to attract one's notice, except that we agree that it is the ugliest we have ever seen; but we walk round the little churchyard, the paucity of graves in which speaks well for the climate of the place. The crosses and railings, made of the commonest wood and in the most fragile manner, are all rotting as they stand or lie (several having assumed the recumbent position); and we are leaving the spot with the conviction that we have wasted five minutes, when we come against a crucifix fastened by heavy iron clamps against the wall of the church. A common iron cross, rusty and red from damp and age, with a figure nailed on it of the most

perfect bronze, old and hard, and dark and bright, and as unchanged by weather and exposure as on the day (perhaps hundreds of years ago) it was first placed there.

Toiling up the street again, and examining the shops as we go, I say that, much as I like Rochefort, I do not advise any one to come here in order to purchase their wedding *trousseau*, or lay in a stock of winter clothing. We look in vain for something to buy in remembrance of the place; but can see nothing out of the way, except it is a yellow teapot, holding at the least four quarts, and with a curled spout to prevent the tea coming out too fast, which must be almost necessary with such a load of liquid. The teapot is delicious, and quite unique; but scarcely worth, we think, the trouble of transportation. We have but just decided this matter to our satisfaction when we come upon a 'miscellaneous warehouse,' upon whose front is painted '*Cartes pour les grottes de Rochefort*,' and remember that we must see the famous grotto, and turn in to ask the price of admission. Five francs a-head; children

half-price. We think the charge is high; but Monsieur C— (to whom the grotto belongs) takes us into his house and shows us prints of the different views of its interior, which fire our imagination to that degree, that we decide at once to see it the next morning. We look over a book also in which visitors to the grotto have written down their first impressions; and these testimonials excite our curiosity still further. A Persian describes himself as having been suddenly transported into fairyland; and can liken the vast caverns to nothing but the palace of his great master the Sultan, and the various forms assumed by the stalactites to those of lovely houris grouped about him. A French poet, in rapturous verse, compares the grotto to the enchanted halls of the Arabian Nights, and the stalactites to 'frozen tears.' Every traveller declares the sight to have been more wonderful and beautiful than anything he has ever seen before, until we become quite sorry to think we must put off seeing it until the morning; and our expectations are heightened by the rapid assurance of

Monsieur C— (who always keeps his hands moving, and never stops to consider his commas), that it is '*trèsbeautrèsbeau-trèsbeau!*' However, we agree to return the next day at eleven o'clock, when he promises the guides shall be in readiness for us; and we go home to another excellent dinner, the pleasure of which is only marred by the fact that Thérèse *will* make us use the same knives and forks for every course; and we haven't the strength of mind to resist.

Yesterday I spoke to madame on the necessity of engaging someone during the mornings to read French and German with the girls, as we shall most likely be here for a month; and it is too long a time for them to be idle. Madame did not think I should find a *demoiselle* in Rochefort who could instruct them; but there is a *professeur* here who has passed all his college examinations, and who, if he has the time, will doubtless be very glad of the employment. I asked her to send for the *professeur* that I might speak to him on the subject; and here, just as we have done

dinner, he arrives; for madame throws open the door, and with a certain pride in her voice (pride that Rochefort should possess such an article), announces '*Monsieur le Professeur.*' I glance up, thinking of Charlotte Brontë and her professor, and hoping this one may not prove as dirty and seedy and snuffy, and, to my amazement, see standing on the threshold a lad of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in green trousers and a blue blouse, and holding his cap in his hand. The two girls immediately choke, and bury their faces in their books, which renders my task of catechising rather a difficult one; and I glance at E— for aid, but his countenance is almost level with the table as he pretends to draw. So I find there is nothing to be done but to beg the *professeur* to be seated,—a request which he steadily refuses to comply with; and as he stands there, twisting his cap in his hands, he looks so like a butcher-boy, that it is a mercy I do not ask him what meat he has to-day.

But the poor young man is so horribly

nervous, as he tells me that, though qualified for a tutor, he has never taught before, that I have not the heart to refuse him on account of his youth; besides, is he not the sole *professeur* in Rochefort? So I give him leave to come the next morning, and try, at all events, what he can do with the girls; and he looks very happy for the permission. And we see him a minute afterwards, striding proudly down the street, whistling as he goes, and holding his head half an inch higher for having 'got a situation.' Of course the children make merry over him for the rest of the evening, and cannot recall the appearance of their *professeur* without shrieks of laughter; but he comes the next morning, nevertheless, to commence his duties, and proves to be quite as particular as older teachers, and much more competent than some, and takes the youngest girl completely aback by telling her she shall be punished if she is not steady.

At eleven o'clock the next morning we are all ready to view the grottoes, and E— and I, with the two eldest children,

start off on our expedition. The way to their entrance lies through Monsieur C—'s park, which in summer must be a very charming resort. He has collected here all the wild animals indigenous to the Ardennes, and shows them to us as we walk to the mouth of the grottoes. Close to his house he has a splendid wolf and three foxes—the golden, silver, and common fox. I should have preferred to keep these interesting specimens a little further off from my own nose; but there is no accounting for tastes. In the aviary he has squirrels, guinea-pigs, doves, pigeons, and the most magnificent pair of horned owls I have ever seen. These birds, which are as fierce as possible, have eyes of jet and amber, as big as half-crowns, and when in their rage they spring at passers-by, they make a noise with their beaks just like castanets.

A little farther up the park we come upon the Ardennes deer, which are thicker built and less graceful than the English fallow-deer, with which they are consorting; and a wild boar, with fierce tusks and

a savage grunt, wallowing in a *parterre* of clay, which, nevertheless, knows his master, and puts his ugly snout out to be scratched between the palisades of his domain. Monsieur C— only conducts us as far as the entrance of the grotto, and there delivers us over to the care of the guides, two in number, who each carry a couple of petroleum lamps, and have 'Grottes de Rochefort' written on their hatbands. They ask us if we will have costumes to enter the caves with, and we decline, not knowing the dirt we shall encounter; but we exchange our own hats for little, grey linen ones, trimmed with a cockade and bunch of small red feathers in front, made after the pattern of those adopted by the monkeys on the organs, and in which we appear very comical to each other's eyes. Everything is ready, and down we go— down the first flight of steps, which is steep but easy, and which, Monsieur C— shouts after us, will be the most difficult descent of all (I wonder if he impresses that fable on all his visitors) until the ivy and fern-covered entrance is passed, and we enter

the very mouth of the cave, which is yet light enough to let us see that several such flights have still to be descended. We have hardly reached the middle of the second, and daylight is not yet left behind us, when E— calls out that he cannot breathe, and must go up into the fresh air again. The guides insist that monsieur must be mistaken, and no one is ever taken ill there. I insist, on the other hand, that monsieur's wishes must be complied with, and we must reaccompany him to the top, which we do. I would rather not go back again then, and make the dark pilgrimage alone with the children, but E— begs we will, and the girls look disappointed ; so we retrace our steps, leaving him in the park.

I confess that as I go down the second time I feel a little nervous, and my limbs shake. I don't like this going down, down, down into the shades of eternal night, with no companions but two little children.

But at last we stand on level ground again. There is no light anywhere except from the guides' lamps, the foremost one (who is always spokesman) waves his above

his head, and introduces *la grande salle*. I look up and around me, but all is black as pitch. I feel that I am standing on broken flints and a great deal of mud; and as the guide's lamp throws its faint gleam here and there, I see that the cavern we stand in is very vast and damp, and uncommonly like a huge cellar; but I can't say I see anything more. In another minute the guide has turned, and leads us through a passage cut in the rock. We are not going up or downstairs now, but picking our way over slippery stones and between places sometimes so narrow and sometimes so low, that our shoulders get various bumps and bruises, and the guide's warning of '*Garde tête!*' sounds continuously. Every now and then we come upon a larger excavation, which is called a *salle*, and given some name consequent on the likeness assumed by the stalactites contained in it. Thus one is called *salle de Brahma*, because it contains a large stalactite, somewhat resembling the idol of tha, name. Another *salle du sacrifice*, because its principal attraction is a large flat stone

at the foot of which is another, shaped sausage-wise, and entitled *tombeau de la victime.* We pace after the guides through these cavernous passages for what appears to me miles, my mind meanwhile being divided between fear that I should leave my boots behind me in the slushy clay, or that either of my children should tumble down or knock her head. Every cavern is like the other, and I look in vain for stalactites which shall remind me of 'houris grouped about the sultan, or 'frozen tears.' The guides occasionally produce a fine effect by burning a little red fire, or letting-off a rocket, or climbing singly up the more perilous places, that we may watch the gradual ascent of their flickering lamps, and judge of the height of the larger *salles.* But I suppose the enthusiastic scribblers in the visitors' book would consider me the possessor of a very darkened intellect if they heard me affirm that I have seen better effects on the stage, and climbed greater heights with much more convenience. Perhaps I have not a sufficiently appreciative soul for grottoes; but the

greater part of the grotto of Rochefort comes up exactly to my idea of a mine, and nothing more.

The 'glittering' stalactites are nowhere. The cave is lined with stalactites, but (with the exception of a few white ones) they are all of a uniform pale-brown colour, and have no idea of glittering or being prismatic. The greatest wonder of the grotto is its vastness, which may be estimated from the fact that we are two hours going over it, and then have not traversed the whole on account of fresh works being carried on in parts. We penetrate to its very depths to see the river and the waterfall, but the mud is so excessive that we are compelled to stop, and let the guide descend with his lamp and flash it over the water, which is really very pretty, and, strange to relate, contains good trout.

Then we plough our way upwards again; up fungus-covered ladders, and wet, slippery stairs, upon which it is most difficult to keep a footing, until we arrive at decidedly the finest sight there—the *salle du sabbat*. Here the guides send up a spirit-

balloon, to show us the height and extent of the vast cavern, and we are rather awe-struck, particularly as, in order that we may see the full effect, the other guide plants us on three chairs and takes away both the lamps, leaving us seated in the darkness, on the edge of a precipice. The blackness is so thick about us that we can almost *feel* it; and the silence is that of death. My youngest girl slips her little hand in mine, and whispers, 'Mamma, supposing he weren't to come back again!' and I can't say the prospect pleases. However, the balloon reaches the top of the cavern, and is hauled back again; and the guide *does* come back; and, whilst he is assisting his fellow to pack it away, I sing a verse of 'God save the Queen,' for the children to hear the echo, which is stupendous.

Then we see the prettiest thing, perhaps, we have seen yet. At the top of the *salle du sabbat* there is a kind of breakage in the side, and a large cluster of stalactites. One guide climbs up to this place and holds his lamp behind the group,

whilst the other calls out '*la femme qui repose;*' when lo! before us there appears almost an exact representation of a woman, reclining with crossed legs, and a child on her bosom. It is so good an imitation, that it might be a figure carved in stone and placed there, and I think the sight gave us more pleasure than anything in the grotto. We have come upon several groups of stalactites already, to which the guides have given names, such as *l'ange de la résurrection*, *l'oreille de l'éléphant*, and *le lion Belge;* but though they have, of course, borne some resemblance to the figures mentioned, the likeness is only admitted for want of a better. This likeness, however, is excellent, could hardly be more like; and we are proportionately pleased. With the *salle du sabbat* and the balloon the exhibition is ended; and we are thankful to emerge into the fresh air again, and to leave slippery staircases and the smell of fungi behind us.

We feel very heated when we stand on the breezy hill again, for the grotto, contrary to our expectation, has proved ex-

ceedingly warm, and the exercise has made us feel more so; and daylight looks so strange that we can scarcely persuade ourselves we have not been passing the night down below. We have picked up several little loose bits of stone and stalactite during our progress, and when we reach home, we spread them out before us on the table, and try to remember where they came from. Here is a bit of marble, veined black-and-white; and here is white stone, glistening and silvery. Here is the stalactite, a veritable piece of 'frozen tears' and *couchant houris.*

Well, we have been a little disappointed with the grottoes of Rochefort, perhaps; we have not found the crystallisations quite so purple-and-amber as we anticipated, or the foundations quite so clean; but, after all, it is what we must expect in this life. If the grotto is not so brilliant as we expected, it is at least a very wonderful and uncommon sight; and so in this life, if we can but forget the purple-and-gold, we may extract a great deal of amusement from very small things, if we choose to try. With which bit of philosophy I conclude.

A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE;

Or, The Amateur Detective.

AM an author. I am something worse than that—I am a Press writer. I am worse than that still—I am a Press writer with a large wife and a small family. And I am an Amateur Detective! I don't mean, of course, that I reckon the last item as part of my profession, but my friends always come to me if they are in any difficulty, and set me to do all kinds of queer jobs, from restoring and reconciling a truant husband to his wife, to making the round of the 'Homes for Lost Dogs' in order to find Lady Softsawder's pet poodle.

Even Jones couldn't complete his great work, 'The Cyclopædia of the Brain,' without asking my assistance (for a consideration, of course) with his fifth section, 'The Origin of Dreams.' Jones is full of fire and imagination, but he does not care for plodding, and he knew me of old for a good steady compiler. I agreed with alacrity. 'The Origin of Dreams' would fill those hungry little mouths of mine for three months at the very least. But how to do it whilst they gaped around me!—how to cover the one table in my solitary sitting-room with valuable works of reference at the risk of their being touched by greasy fingers!—how to wade through volume after volume, placing a mental mark there and a material one here, whilst my offspring either surreptitiously removed the one or irretrievably obliterated remembrance of the other, by attracting my attention to the manner in which they attempted to scalp each other's heads or gouge out each other's eyes! I tried it for a week in vain.

My Press work I had been accustomed

to do at office, but this, which was to be based upon the contents of certain ponderous black-lettered tomes which Jones had been collecting for ages past, must be carried on at home, and the noisy, wearisome day gave me no time for reflection, and left me without energy to labour at night. I was about to resign the task in despair—to tell Jones to give it to some more capable or more fortunate labourer in the wide field of speculation — when Fate came to my rescue in the person of the Hon. Captain Rivers, Lord Seaborne's son.

'My dad's in an awful way about his ward, young Cockleboat,' he remarked to me, in his friendly manner, 'and he wants your assistance, Trueman, if you'll give it him.'

'Why, what's the matter, Captain Rivers?'

'Haven't you heard? Cockleboat's made a fool of himself. He fell in love with a nursemaid, or a barmaid, or some such sort of person—he, with his twenty thousand a-year in prospect; and when

the governor remonstrated with him—told him 'twas nonsense and couldn't be, and all that sort of thing, he actually ran away!'

'Left Lord Seaborne's house?'

'Of course, and without a word of explanation. Now, dad doesn't want to make the affair public, you know, unless it becomes necessary, so he hasn't said a word to the police; but he wants you to find out where Cockleboat is—you're so clever at that sort of thing—and just bring him home again.'

'An easy task, certainly. And you don't even know which way the lad has gone?'

'Well, we think we've traced him to Norwich, and dad thought if you wouldn't mind going up there for a bit, and keeping your eyes open; of course we should make it worth your while, you know, you might hear something of the young scamp for us.'

'What on earth can be his motive for leaving home?'

'Well, perhaps the lady lives up that way, or Julian may have got it into his

head that he'll work to support her. He is but twenty last birthday, and will not be of age, by his father's will, for the next five years — very lucky for him, as it's turned out, that he will not be.'

'True. I think I remember seeing the lad at Lady Godiva's last season. Didn't he act there in some private theatricals or charades?'

'I believe he did. Now, Trueman, what's your decision? Will you go to Norwich for us or not?'

'I will start to-morrow if your father wishes it.'

The offer had come most opportunely; even as Captain Rivers was speaking it had flashed through my mind that here was the very opportunity that I desired to carry out my project of writing the fifth section of Jones' Cyclopædia; — a remote lodging in one of the back streets of the quiet old city of Norwich, whence I could carry on my inquiries all day, and where I might sit up and write out my notes all night. And Lord Seaborne's generosity in such cases was too well

known to permit of any doubt on the subject whether I should not (by accepting his proposal) be killing two birds with one stone. So I did accept it, with gratitude, and having obtained all the information possible respecting the mysterious disappearance of Master Julian Cockleboat, I packed up the black-lettered tomes, and, embracing my smiling wife and children, who appeared rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of getting rid of me for a few weeks, started for Norwich.

I have a great respect for old county towns: there is a dignified sobriety and sense of unimpeachable respectability about them that impresses me. I like their old-world institutions and buildings — their butter crosses and market steps; their dingy bye streets with kerbstones for pavements; their portentous churches and beadles; their old-fashioned shops and goods and shopmen. I like the quiet that reigns in their streets, the paucity of gas they light them up with, the strange conveyances their citizens ply for hire— in fact, I like everything with which the

world in general finds fault. So it was with a sense of pleasure I found myself wandering about the streets of Norwich, on the look-out for some place in which to lay my head. I had rather have been there than at the seaside, although it was bright July weather, and I knew the waves were frothing and creaming over the golden sands beneath a canopy of cloudless blue sky. I preferred the shaded, cloister-like streets of the county town, with its cool flags under my feet, and its unbroken sense of calm.

I did not turn into the principal thoroughfares, with their gay shops and gayer passengers, but down the less-frequented bye-ways, where children playing in the road stopped open-mouthed to watch me pass, and women's heads appeared above the window-blinds, as my footfall sounded on the narrow pavement, as though a stranger were something to be stared at. Many windows held the announcement of 'Rooms to Let,' but they were too small —too modern, shall I say—too fresh-looking to take my fancy.

I connected space and gloom with solitude and reflection, and felt as if I could not have sat down before a muslin-draped window, filled with scarlet geraniums and yellow canariensis, to ponder upon 'The Origin of Dreams,' to save my life. At last I came upon what I wanted. Down a narrow street, into which the sun seemed never to have penetrated, I found some tall, irregular, dingy-looking buildings—most of which appeared to be occupied as insurance, wine, or law offices,—and in the lower window of one there hung a card with the inscription, 'Apartments for a Single Gentleman.'

It was just the place from which to watch and wait—in which to ponder, and compare, and compose,—and I ascended its broken steps, convinced that the birthplace of 'The Origin of Dreams' was found. A middle-aged woman, with an intelligent, pleasing face answered my summons to the door. The weekly rent she asked for the occupation of the vacant apartments sounded to me absurdly low, but perhaps that was due to my experience

of the exorbitant demands of London landladies. But when I explained to her the reason for which I desired her rooms, namely, that I might sit up at night and write undisturbed, her countenance visibly fell.

'I'm afraid they won't suit you, then, sir.'

'Why not? Have you any objection to my studying by night?'

'Oh, no, sir. You could do as you pleased about that!'

'What then? Will your other lodgers disturb me?'

Her face twitched as she answered, 'I have no other lodgers, sir.'

'Do you live in this big house, then, by yourself?'

'My husband and I have been in charge of it for years, and are permitted to occupy the lower floor in consideration of keeping the upper rooms (which are only used as offices in the day-time) clean and in order. But the clerks are all gone by five o'clock, so they wouldn't interfere with your night-work.'

'What will, then?'

'I'm afraid there are a good many rats about the place, sir. They *will* breed in these old houses, and keep up a racket at night.'

'Oh, I don't mind the rats," I answered, cheerfully. "I'll catch as many as I can for you, and frighten away the others. If that is your only objection, the rooms are mine. May I see them?'

'Certainly, sir,' she said, as she closed the door behind me and led the way into two lofty and spacious chambers, connected by folding-doors, which had once formed the dining-saloon of a splendid mansion.

'The owners of the house permit us to occupy this floor and the basement, and as it's more than we require, we let these rooms to lodgers. They're not very grandly furnished, sir, but it's all neat and clean.'

She threw open the shutters of the further apartment as she spoke, and the July sun streamed into the empty room. As its rays fell upon the unmade bed, my eye followed them and caught sight of

a deep indentation in the mattress. The landlady saw it also, and looked amazed.

'Some one has been taking a siesta here without your permission,' I said, jestingly; but she did not seem to take my remark as a jest.

'It must be my good man,' she answered, hurriedly, as she shook the mattress; 'perhaps he came in here to lie down for a bit. This hot weather makes the best feel weak, sir.'

'Very true. And now, if you will accept me as a lodger, I will pay you my first week's rent, and whilst I go back to the railway-station to fetch my valise, you must get me ready a chop or a steak, or anything that is most handy, for my dinner.'

All appeared to be satisfactory. My landlady assented to everything I suggested, and in another hour I was comfortably ensconced under her roof, had eaten my steak, and posted a letter to my wife, and felt very much in charity with all mankind. So I sat at the open window thinking how beautifully still and

sweet all my surroundings were, and how much good work I should get through without fear of interruption or distraction. The office clerks had long gone home the upper rooms were locked for the night; only an occasional patter along the wide uncarpeted staircase reminded me that I was not quite alone. Then I remembered the rats, and 'The Origin of Dreams;' and thinking it probable that my honest old couple retired to bed early, rang the bell to tell my landlady to be sure and leave me a good supply of candles.

'You're not going to sit up and write to-night, sir, are you?' she inquired. 'I am sure your rest would do you more good; you must be real tired.'

'Not at all, my good Mrs Bizzey' (Did I say her name was Bizzey?), 'I am as fresh as a daisy, and could not close my eyes. Besides, as your friends, the rats, seem to make so free in the house, I should burn a light any way to warn them they had better not come too near me.'

'Oh, I trust nothing will disturb you

sir,' she said, earnestly, as she withdrew to fetch the candles.

I unpacked my book-box and piled the big volumes on a side table. How imposing they looked! But I had no intention of poring over them that night. 'The Origin of Dreams' required thought —deep and speculative thought; and how could I be better circumstanced to indulge in it than stationed at that open window, with a pipe in my mouth, looking up at the dark blue sky bespangled with stars, and listening (if I may be allowed to speak so paradoxically) to the silence—for there is a silence that can be heard?

When Mrs Bizzey brought me the candles, she asked me if I required anything else, as she and Mr Bizzey were about to retire to the marital couch, which I afterwards ascertained was erected in the scullery. I answered in the negative, and wished her good-night, hearing her afterwards distinctly close the door at the head of the kitchen stairs and descend step by step to the arms of her lord and master. But Mrs Bizzey's in-

trusion had murdered my reverie. I could not take up the chain of thought where she had severed the links. The night air, too, seemed to have grown suddenly damp and chilly, and I pulled down the window sash with a jerk, and taking out my note-book and writing-case drew a chair up to the table and commenced to think, playing idly with my pen the while. Soon the divine afflatus (the symptoms of which every successful writer knows so well) came down upon me. I ceased to think—or rather to be aware that I was thinking. My pen ran over the paper as though some other hand guided it than my own, and I wrote rapidly, filling page after page with a stream of ideas that seemed to pour out of my brain involuntarily. Time is of no account under such circumstances, and I may have been scribbling for one hour or for three, for aught I knew to the contrary, before I was roused to a sense of my position by hearing a footfall sound through the silent, deserted house.

Now, although I have described my

condition to be such as to render me impervious to outer impressions, I am certain of one thing—that no noise, however slight, had hitherto broken in upon it. It was the complete absence of sound that had permitted my spirit to have full play irrespective of my body ; and directly the silence was outraged, my physical life re-asserted its claims, and my senses became all alive to ascertain the cause of it. In another moment the sound was repeated, and I discovered that it was over my head—not under my feet. It could not, then, proceed from either of the old couple, whom I had heard lock themselves up together down below. Who could it be ?

My first idea, emanating from my landlady's information that the noise might proceed from rats, I had already dismissed with contempt. It was the reverberation of a footstep. There could be no doubt about that ; and my next thought naturally flew to burglars, who were making an attempt on the safes in the offices above. What could I do ? I was utterly

unarmed, and to go in pursuit of midnight robbers in so defenceless a condition would be simply delivering myself into their power. I certainly might have shied a couple of Jones' black-lettered books at their heads, for they were ponderous enough to knock any man down, but I might not take a steady aim, and it is better not to attempt at all than to attempt and fail.

Meanwhile, the sounds overhead had increased in number and become continuous, as though some one had commenced to walk up and down the room. Surely no midnight thief would dare to create so much disturbance as that! Detection of his crime would be inevitable. Or did he trust to the sound sleep of the porter and his wife in the kitchen below, not knowing that I, existent and wakeful, intervened between himself and them? In another minute I believe that I should have cast all consequences to the winds, and rushed, not *in*, but *up* to the rescue, forgetting I was a husband and a father, and armed with Jones' patent self-acting

leveller, alone have ascended to the upper story to investigate the cause of the midnight disturbance I heard. Only — *I didn't!* For before I had had time to shoulder my weapons and screw my courage up to the sticking-point, another sound reached my ears that made the patent levellers drop on the table again with a thump,—the sound, not of a step, but a groan — a deep, hollow, unmistakable groan, that chilled the marrow in my bones to such a degree that it would have been a disgrace to any cook to send them up to table.

I knew then that I must have been mistaken in my first theory, and that the sounds I overheard, whether they proceeded from mortals or not, had no connection with the nefarious occupation of housebreakers. But they had become a thousand times more interesting, and I listened attentively.

The groan was followed by some muttered words that sounded like a curse, succeeded by louder tones of reproach or anger. Then the footsteps traversed the

floor again, and seemed to be chasing someone or something round and round the room. At last I heard another groan, followed by a heavy fall.

I started to my feet. Surely Mr and Mrs Bizzey must have been roused by such an unusual commotion, and would come upstairs to learn the reason! But no!—they did not stir. All was silent as the grave below, and above also. The noises had suddenly ceased. I appeared to be alone in the empty house. It was all so strange that I put my hands up to my head and asked myself if I were properly awake. I was hardly satisfied on this point before the sounds recommenced overhead, and precisely in the same order as before. Again I listened to the pacing feet—the groan—the curse—the chase—the fall! Each phase of the ghostly tragedy—for such I now felt sure it must be—was repeated in rotation, not once, but a couple of dozen or more times; and then at last the disturbance ceased as suddenly and as unexpectedly as it had commenced.

I looked at my watch. It was three o'clock, and already the early birds on the look-out for the worm had begun to herald the dawn with a few faint twitters in the trees in the cloister. I threw off my clothes impatiently, and lying down in my bed, gave myself up, not to sleep, but reflection on what was best to be done. I had not the slightest doubt left as to the cause of the noises I had heard. My landlady might ascribe them to rats, but were she closely questioned she would probably acknowledge the truth—that she knew the sounds to proceed from spirits, popularly called ghosts; which accounted for all her hesitation and change of countenance when speaking to me about the apartments, also for the low price she asked for her rooms, and her evident wish to dissuade me from sitting up at night.

Naturally the poor woman was afraid she should never secure a lodger if the truth were known; but as far as I was concerned, she was altogether mistaken—I was not afraid of her ghosts. On the contrary, as I lay in bed and thought on

what had just occurred, I congratulated myself that, by a third strange coincidence, my visit to Norwich promised to turn out all that I could desire.

I must 'lay' these ghosts, of course—*i.e.*, if they interfered with my graver work; but to have the opportunity of doing so was the very thing my heart was set upon. Is my reader surprised to hear this? Then I must take him further into my confidence.

When I confessed I was an author, Press writer, amateur detective, and father of six children, I did not add the crowning iniquity, and write myself down a believer in ghosts and spiritualism. Every man acknowledges himself a spirit, and to have been created by the power of a spirit. Most men believe that spirits have the capability of free volition and locomotion, and many that they have exercised these powers by re-appearing to their fellow spirits in the flesh. But to assert publicly that you believe in all this because you have proved it to be the truth, is to throw yourself open to the charge of being a dupe, or a mad-

man, or a liar. Therefore I had preferred until then to keep my faith a secret. My children's bread depended in a great measure on the reputation I kept up as a man of sense, and I had not dared to risk it by attempting to put my theories into practice. Not that I was entirely ignorant of the rules pertaining to the science of spiritualism. Under cover of the darkness that hides all delinquencies, I had attended several circles gathered for the sole purpose of investigating the mysteries of other worlds; but it had always been accomplished with the utmost secrecy, as my wife was hysterically disposed, and the mere mention of a spirit would have upset the house for days together.

I had never, therefore, had the opportunity of pursuing spiritualism on my own account; and until the day broke I lay awake, congratulating myself on the good luck that had thrown me, cheek by jowl, with a party of ready-made ghosts, whom a very little encouragement would, I trusted, induce to pay me a visit in my own apartments.

All the next day I wandered through the streets of Norwich and in the country surrounding them, speculating—not on the whereabouts of Julian Cockleboat, nor 'The Origin of Dreams'—but how I should persuade my landlady to help me unravel the mysterious occurrence of the night before. At last I bethought me that 'honesty is the best policy' after all, and decided that I would make a clean breast of my suspicions and desires. If Mrs Bizzey were a sensible woman, she would prove only too ready to aid me in ridding her apartments of visitors that must injure their reputation; and, at all events, I could but try her. So I opened the subject on the very first opportunity. The woman was clearing away my tea-things the same evening, when she remarked that I had not eaten well.

'I am afraid you sit up too much at night, sir, to make a good appetite.'

'Other people seem to sit up in this house at night as well as myself, Mrs Bizzey,' I replied, significantly.

'I don't understand you,' she said, colouring.

'Why, do you mean to say you never hear noises;—that you were not disturbed last night, for instance, by the sound of groans and voices, and of some one falling about in the upper rooms?'

'Oh, sir, you don't mean to tell me as you've heard them already!' exclaimed Mrs Bizzey, clasping her hands and letting a teacup fall in her agitation. 'If you go too, you'll be the third gentleman that has left within a fortnight on that account; and if a stop ain't put to it, the house will get such a name that nobody will put a foot inside the door for love or money.'

'But I don't mean to go, Mrs Bizzey; on the contrary, I should be very sorry to go; and if you and your husband will consent to help me, I will do my best to stop the noises altogether,' for the idea of forming a little circle with these worthy people had suddenly flashed into my mind.

'How can me and my good man help you, sir?'

'Is Mr Bizzey at home? If so, go

downstairs and fetch him up here, and I will explain what I mean to you both at the same time.'

She left the room at once, and in a few minutes returned with a dapper-looking little old fellow, in knee-breeches and a red plush waistcoat, who pulled his forelock to me on entering.

'This is Mr Bizzey, sir, and I've been telling him all you say as we came up the stairs.'

I leant back in my chair, folded my hands, and looked important.

'I suppose you must have heard the science of spiritualism mentioned?' I commenced, grandly.

'The science of *what*, sir?' inquired Mr Bizzey, with a puzzled air.

'Of spiritualism—*i.e.*, the power of converse or communication with disembodied spirits.'

'Lor'! you never mean "*ghosts*," sir?' said the old woman.

'I do, indeed, Mrs Bizzey. I suppose you believe that spirits (or ghosts, as you call them) may re-appear after death?'

'Oh, yes,' interposed the husband; 'for I mind the night that my poor mother lay dying, there was an apparition of a turkey-cock that sat upon the palings opposite our cottage, and when it fluttered off 'em with a screech, just for all the world like a real turkey, you know, sir, she turned on her side suddenly, and give up the ghost. I've always believed in apparitions since then.'

'And when my sister Jane lay in of her last,' chimed in Mrs Bizzey, 'there was a little clock stood on the mantel-shelf that had always been wound up regular and gone regular ever since she was married; and we was moving a lot of things to one side, and we moved that clock and found it had stopped; and the nurse, she said to me, "Mark my words if that's not a warning of death;" and, sure enough, Jane died before the morning, which makes me so careful of moving a clock since then that I'd rather go three miles round than touch one if a body lay sick in the house.'

'I see that you both take a most sensible view of the business, and are fully alive to the importance attached to it, I answered;

'I hope, therefore, to secure your assistance to find out what these unusual and mysterious noises in your house portend, and what the authors require us to do for them.'

Then—whilst the old man scratched his head with bewilderment, and the old woman looked scared out of her seven senses—I explained to them, as well as I was able, the nature of a séance, and asked them if they would come and sit at the table with me that evening and hold one.

'But, lawk a mussy, sir, you never want to speak to them!' cried Mrs Bizzey.

'How else are we to ascertain for what reason these spirits disturb your lodgers and render your rooms uninhabitable by their pranks?'

'I should die of fright before we had been at it five minutes,' was her comment; but her husband was pluckier, and took a more practical view of the matter.

'You'll just do as I bid you, missus, and hold your chatter. There's no doubt these noises are a great nuisance—not to say a loss—and if this gentleman will be good

enough to try and stop them, and can't do without us, I'll help him for one, and you will for another.'

Mrs Bizzey protested, and wept, and was even refractory, but it was all of no avail, and before we separated it had been agreed we should meet again at ten o'clock, and hold a séance. There was some whispering between the old couple after that that I did not quite understand, but as it ended by Mrs Bizzey ejaculating, 'Nonsense; I tell you the house will be quiet enough by ten o'clock,' I concluded he was referring to some expected visitor, and dismissed the subject from my mind. As soon as they had disappeared I delivered myself up to self-gratulation. I was really going to hold a séance, under my own direction and the most favourable circumstances, with a large haunted house at my command, and no one to be any the wiser for my dabbling in the necromantic art. I took out an old number of the 'Spiritualist,' and referred to the directions for forming circles at home. I prepared the paper, pencils, and speaking tubes, and

symmetrically arranged the table and chairs.

Nothing was wanted when Mr and Mrs Bizzey entered my room at the appointed hour—he looking expectant, and she very much alarmed. I was prepared for this, however, and insisted upon their both joining me in a glass of whisky and hot water before commencing the sitting, alleging as a reason the fact that the presence of spirits invariably chills the atmosphere, whether in summer or winter. So I mixed three bumping tumblers of toddy, strong enough to give us the courage we required for the occasion ; and after we had (according to the directions) engaged for some little time in light and friendly conversation, I induced my friends to approach the table.

It was now, I was glad to see by my watch, about half-past eleven—just about the time when the mysterious sounds had commenced the night before ; and having lowered the lamp, much to Mrs Bizzey's horror, until it was represented by a mere glimmer of light, I instructed her husband

and herself how to place their hands upon the table, linked with mine, and the séance began.

I had enjoined perfect silence on my companions, and after we had been sitting still for about fifteen minutes, during which I had watched in vain for some symptoms of movement on the part of the table, we all heard distinctly the sound of a foot creeping cautiously about the upper rooms, upon which Mrs Bizzey, too frightened to shriek, began to weep, and her husband, in order to stop her, pinched her violently in the dark.

'Hush!' I exclaimed, almost as agitated as the woman. 'Do not disturb them for your life, and whatever you may see, don't scream.'

'La, sir, you never mean to say that they'll come downstairs?'

'I cannot say what they may do. I think I hear a step descending now. But remember, Mrs Bizzey, they will not hurt you, and try and be brave for all our sakes.'

We were in a state of high nervous ex-

citement for the next five minutes, during which the same noises I had heard the night before were repeated overhead, only that the curses were louder and delivered with more determination, and the falls appeared to succeed each other like hail.

'Oh, sir, what are they a-doing?' exclaimed Mrs Bizzey, paralysed with terror. 'They must be killing each other all round.'

'Hush!' I replied. 'Listen, now. Some one is pleading for love or for mercy. How soft and clear the voice is!'

'It sounds for all the world like my poor sister Jane when she was asking her husband to forgive her for everything she had done amiss,' said the old woman.

'Perhaps it is your sister Jane, or some of your relations,' I replied. 'She may want you to do something for her. Would you be afraid if she were suddenly to open the door and come into the room?'

'Oh, I don't know, I'm sure, sir; but I hope she mayn't. It makes me curdle all over only to think of it.'

'They're quieter now. Let us ask if

there is any one present who wishes to speak to us,' I said; and addressing the table to that effect, I commenced to spell out the alphabet rather loudly—'A, B, C,' etc.

Whether from my nervousness, or the united strain we laid upon it, I know not, but the table certainly began to rock at that juncture, though I could make neither head nor tail of its intentions. Treating it in the orthodox manner by which Britons invariably attempt to communicate with a foreigner who does not understand one word of the language spoken, I began to bawl at the table, and my A, B, C must have reverberated through the empty house.

Again the old woman whispered mysteriously to the old man, but he dismissed her question with an impatient answer; and my attention was too much attracted in another direction at that moment to give much heed of what they were doing. My ear had caught the sound of a descending footstep, and I felt sure the spirits were at last about to visit us *in propriæ personæ.*

But dreading the effect it might have on Mrs Bizzey's nerves, I purposely held my tongue, and applied myself afresh to a vigorous repetition of the alphabet, striving to cover the approaching footstep by the noise of my own voice, although I was trembling with excitement and delight at the successful issue of my undertaking. At last I plainly heard the footstep pause outside the door, as though deliberating before it opened it. The old man was apparently too deaf or too absorbed to notice it, and his wife was in a state of helpless fright. I alone sufficiently retained my senses to see the door slowly open, and a white-robed figure—a real, materialised spirit—stand upon the threshold. The gesture of delight, which I could not repress, roused my companions from their reverie; and as soon as Mrs Bizzey turned and saw the figure, she recognised it.

'It's Jane!' she screamed. 'It's my own poor sister Jane come back from the grave to visit me again, with her red hair and blue eyes; I can see 'em as plain as

plain. I'll die of the shock, I know I shall!'

'Nonsense!' I exclaimed, sternly, fearful, lest by her folly she should scare the newly-born spirit back to the spheres. 'If it is your sister, speak to her as you used to do. Tell her you are glad to see her, and ask if she wants anything done.'

'Oh, Jane!' said the old woman, half falling upon her knees, 'don't come a-nigher me, for mercy's sake! I never kept nothing of yourn back from the children except the old blue dress, which it wouldn't have been no use for them to wear, and the ring, which I had asked you to give me a dozen times in your life, and you had always refused. I'd give 'em both back now if I could, Jane, but the gownd have been on the dust-heap these twenty years past, and the ring I sold the minute my man was laid up with rheumatis. Forgive me, Jane, forgive me!'

'*Why, what on earth are you making such a row about?*' replied the spirit.

I leapt to my feet in a moment.

'This is some shameful hoax!' I ex-

claimed. 'Who are you, and what do you do here?'

'I should think I might put the same question to you, since I find you sitting in the dark, at dead of night, with my landlord and landlady.'

'Lor', Mr Montmorency, it's never you, sir!' ejaculated old Bizzey, with a feeble giggle.

The voice seemed familiar to me. Who on earth was this Mr Montmorency, who had intruded upon our séance at the most important juncture? I turned up the lamp and threw its light full upon his features. 'Good heavens!' I exclaimed, 'it's Julian Cockleboat.'

The young man was equally astonished with myself.

'Did Lord Seaborne send you after me?' he said, guessing the truth at once. 'And how did you find out I was lodging here?'

'Aha, my boy!' I replied, unwilling to deny the *kúdos* with which he credited me, 'that's *my* secret. Do you suppose I have gained the name of the amateur detective among my friends for nothing? No, no!

I am in Norwich expressly for the purpose of restoring you to your guardian, and as I knew that to show my hand more openly would be to scare you off to another hiding place, I devised this little plan for making you reveal yourself in your true character.'

'Did Robson tell you, then, that I had taken an engagement at the theatre here?'

'Never you mind, Mr Cockleboat; it is quite sufficient that I knew it. This is a proper sort of house to play hide-and-seek in, isn't it?'

I was dispersing the table and chairs again with angry jerks as I spoke, fearful lest my attempted investigation of the occult mysteries should be discovered before I had removed its traces.

'Still I can't understand how you discovered that Mr Montmorency was myself, although naturally my night rehearsals must have disturbed you. But you told me you had no other lodgers,' continued Julian Cockleboat reproachfully, to the Bizzeys.

'And you said the same thing to me,' I added, in similar tones.

'Well, sir—well, Mr Montmorency, I'm very sorry it should have happened so,' replied the landlord, turning from one to the other, 'but it's all my old woman's fault, for I said to her—'

'You did nothing of the sort,' interrupted his better half; 'for when I come to you and told you as a second gentleman wanted rooms here, it was you as said, "Let him have the little room upstairs, and no one will be ever the wiser if he takes his meals out of a day."'

'But we never thought—begging your pardon, Mr Montmorency—as you'd take such a liberty with the upper offices as to make noises in them as should disturb the whole house.'

'Well, what was I to do?' replied the young man, appealing to me. 'They've given me three leading parts to get up at a fortnight's notice, and if I don't study them at night I have no chance of being ready in time.'

'In fact,' I said, oracularly, 'you've been cheating each other all round. Mr Bizzey has cheated his employers by letting apart

ments to which he has no right; you have cheated the Bizzeys by using one which you never hired of them; and I have—' 'cheated myself,' I might have added, but I stopped short and looked wise instead.

'And it was never no ghosts after all!' said Mrs Bizzey, in accents of disappointment, as her husband marched her downstairs.

. . . . . .

There is nothing more to tell. I reconciled Mr Julian Cockleboat to his guardian and his destiny; and I wrote 'The Origin of Dreams,' the best part, by the way (as all the critics affirmed), of 'The Cyclopædia of the Brain.' I made more money by my little trip than six months of ordinary labour would have brought me; and Lord Seaborne speaks of me to this day, amongst his acquaintances, as the 'very cleverest amateur detective he has ever known.'

And so I am.

THE END.

THE GHOST OF CHARLOTTE CRAY.

MR SIGISMUND BRAGGETT was sitting in the little room he called his study, wrapped in a profound—not to say a mournful—reverie. Now, there was nothing in the present life nor surroundings of Mr Braggett to account for such a demonstration. He was a publisher and bookseller; a man well to do, with a thriving business in the city, and the prettiest of all pretty villas at Streatham. And he was only just turned forty; had not a grey hair in his head nor a false tooth in his mouth; and

had been married but three short months to one of the fairest and most affectionate specimens of English womanhood that ever transformed a bachelor's quarters into Paradise.

What more could Mr Sigismund Braggett possibly want? Nothing! His trouble lay in the fact that he had got rather more than he wanted. Most of us have our little peccadilloes in this world—awkward reminiscences that we would like to bury five fathoms deep, and never hear mentioned again, but that have an uncomfortable habit of cropping up at the most inconvenient moments; and no mortal is more likely to be troubled with them than a middle-aged bachelor who has taken to matrimony.

Mr Sigismund Braggett had no idea what he was going in for when he led the blushing Emily Primrose up to the altar, and swore to be hers, and hers only, until death should them part. He had no conception a woman's curiosity could be so keen, her tongue so long, and her inventive faculties so correct. He had spent

whole days before the fatal moment of marriage in burning letters, erasing initials, destroying locks of hair, and making offerings of affection look as if he had purchased them with his own money. But it had been of little avail. Mrs Braggett had swooped down upon him like a beautiful bird of prey, and wheedled, coaxed, or kissed him out of half his secrets before he knew what he was about. But he had never told her about Charlotte Cray. And now he almost wished that he had done so, for Charlotte Cray was the cause of his present dejected mood.

Now, there are ladies *and* ladies in this world. Some are very shy, and will only permit themselves to be wooed by stealth. Others, again, are the pursuers rather than the pursued, and chase the wounded or the flying even to the very doors of their stronghold, or lie in wait for them like an octopus, stretching out their tentacles on every side in search of victims.

And to the latter class Miss Charlotte Cray decidedly belonged. Not a person worth mourning over, you will naturally

say. But, then, Mr Sigismund Braggett had not behaved well to her. She was one of the 'peccadilloes.' She was an authoress—not an author, mind you, which term smacks more of the profession than the sex—but an 'authoress,' with lots of the 'ladylike' about the plots of her stories and the metre of her rhymes. They had come together in the sweet connection of publisher and writer—had met first in a dingy, dusty little office at the back of his house of business, and laid the foundation of their friendship with the average amount of chaffering and prevarication that usually attend such proceedings.

Mr Braggett ran a risk in publishing Miss Cray's tales or verses, but he found her useful in so many other ways that he used occasionally to hold forth a sop to Cerberus in the shape of publicity for the sake of keeping her in his employ. For Miss Charlotte Cray—who was as old as himself, and had arrived at the period of life when women are said to pray 'Any, good Lord, any!'—was really a clever woman, and could turn her hand to most

things required of her, or upon which she had set her mind; and she had most decidedly set her mind upon marrying Mr Braggett, and he—to serve his own purposes—had permitted her to cherish the idea, and this was the Nemesis that was weighing him down in the study at the present moment. He had complimented Miss Cray, and given her presents, and taken her out a-pleasuring, all because she was useful to him, and did odd jobs that no one else would undertake, and for less than any one else would have accepted; and he had known the while that she was in love with him, and that she believed he was in love with her.

He had not thought much of it at the time. He had not then made up his mind to marry Emily Primrose, and considered that what pleased Miss Cray, and harmed no one else, was fair play for all sides. But he had come to see things differently now. He had been married three months, and the first two weeks had been very bitter ones to him. Miss Cray had written him torrents of reproaches during that

unhappy period, besides calling day after day at his office to deliver them in person. This and her threats had frightened him out of his life. He had lived in hourly terror lest the clerks should overhear what passed at their interviews, or that his wife should be made acquainted with them.

He had implored Miss Cray, both by word of mouth and letter, to cease her persecution of him; but all the reply he received was that he was a base and perjured man, and that she should continue to call at his office, and write to him through the penny post, until he had introduced her to his wife. For therein lay the height and depth of his offending. He had been afraid to bring Emily and Miss Cray together, and the latter resented the omission as an insult. It was bad enough to find that Sigismund Braggett, whose hair she wore next her heart, and whose photograph stood as in a shrine upon her bedroom mantelpiece, had married another woman, without giving her even the chance of a refusal, but it was worse still to come to the conclusion that he did not intend her

to have a glimpse into the garden of Eden he had created for himself.

Miss Cray was a lady of vivid imagination and strong aspirations. All was not lost in her ideas, although Mr Braggett *had* proved false to the hopes he had raised. Wives did not live for ever; and the chances and changes of this life were so numerous, that stranger things had happened than that Mr Braggett might think fit to make better use of the second opportunity afforded him than he had done of the first. But if she were not to continue even his friend, it was too hard. But the perjured publisher had continued resolute, notwithstanding all Miss Cray's persecution, and now he had neither seen nor heard from her for a month; and, manlike, he was beginning to wonder what had become of her, and whether she had found anybody to console her for his untruth. Mr Braggett did not wish to comfort Miss Cray himself; but he did not quite like the notion of her being comforted.

After all—so he soliloquised—he had been very cruel to her; for the poor thing

was devoted to him. How her eyes used to sparkle and her cheek to flush when she entered his office, and how eagerly she would undertake any work for him, however disagreeable to perform! He knew well that she had expected to be Mrs Braggett, and it must have been a terrible disappointment to her when he married Emily Primrose.

Why had he not asked her out to Violet Villa since? What harm could she do as a visitor there? particularly if he cautioned her first as to the peculiarity of Mrs Braggett's disposition, and the quickness with which her jealousy was excited. It was close upon Christmas-time, the period when all old friends meet together and patch up, if they cannot entirely forget, everything that has annoyed them in the past. Mr Braggett pictured to himself the poor old maid sitting solitary in her small rooms at Hammersmith, no longer able to live in the expectation of seeing his manly form at the wicket-gate, about to enter and cheer her solitude. The thought smote him as a two-edged sword, and he sat

down at once and penned Miss Charlotte a note, in which he inquired after her health, and hoped that they should soon see her at Violet Villa.

He felt much better after this note was written and despatched. He came out of the little study and entered the cheerful drawing-room, and sat with his pretty wife by the light of the fire, telling her of the lonely lady to whom he had just proposed to introduce her.

'An old friend of mine, Emily. A clever, agreeable woman, though rather eccentric. You will be polite to her, I know, for my sake.'

'An *old* woman, is she?' said Mrs Braggett, elevating her eyebrows. 'And what do you call 'old,' Siggy, I should like to know?'

'Twice as old as yourself, my dear—five-and-forty at the very least, and not personable-looking, even for that age. Yet I think you will find her a pleasant companion, and I am sure she will be enchanted with you.'

'I don't know that: clever women don't

like me, as a rule, though I don't know why.'

'They are jealous of your beauty, my darling; but Miss Cray is above such meanness, and will value you for your own sake.'

'She'd better not let me catch her valuing me for *yours*,' responded Mrs Braggett, with a flash of the eye that made her husband ready to regret the dangerous experiment he was about to make of bringing together two women who had each, in her own way, a claim upon him, and each the will to maintain it.

So he dropped the subject of Miss Charlotte Cray, and took to admiring his wife's complexion instead, so that the evening passed harmoniously, and both parties were satisfied.

For two days Mr Braggett received no answer from Miss Cray, which rather surprised him. He had quite expected that on the reception of his invitation she would rush down to his office and into his arms, behind the shelter of the ground-glass door that enclosed his chair of

authority. For Miss Charlotte had been used on occasions to indulge in rapturous demonstrations of the sort, and the remembrance of Mrs Braggett located in Violet Villa would have been no obstacle whatever to her. She believed she had a prior claim to Mr Braggett. However, nothing of the kind happened, and the perjured publisher was becoming strongly imbued with the idea that he must go out to Hammersmith and see if he could not make his peace with her in person, particularly as he had several odd jobs for Christmas-tide, which no one could undertake so well as herself, when a letter with a black-edged border was put into his hand. He opened it mechanically, not knowing the writing; but its contents shocked him beyond measure.

'HONOURED SIR,—I am sorry to tell you that Miss Cray died at my house a week ago, and was buried yesterday. She spoke of you several times during her last illness, and if you would like to hear any further particulars, and will call on me at

the old address, I shall be most happy to furnish you with them.—Yours respectfully,

'MARY THOMPSON.'

When Mr Braggett read this news, you might have knocked him over with a feather. It is not always true that a living dog is better than a dead lion. Some people gain considerably in the estimation of their friends by leaving this world, and Miss Charlotte Cray was one of them. Her persecution had ceased for ever, and her amiable weaknesses were alone held in remembrance. Mr Braggett felt a positive relief in the knowledge that his dead friend and his wife would never now be brought in contact with each other; but at the same time he blamed himself more than was needful, perhaps, for not having seen nor communicated with Miss Cray for so long before her death. He came down to breakfast with a portentously grave face that morning, and imparted the sad intelligence to Mrs Braggett with the air of an undertaker. Emily wondered, pitied, and sympathised, but the dead lady was no

more to her than any other stranger; and she was surprised her husband looked so solemn over it all. Mr Braggett, however, could not dismiss the subject easily from his mind. It haunted him during the business hours of the morning, and as soon as he could conveniently leave his office, he posted away to Hammersmith. The little house in which Miss Cray used to live looked just the same, both inside and outside: how strange it seemed that *she* should have flown away from it for ever! And here was her landlady, Mrs Thompson, bobbing and curtseying to him in the same old black net cap with artificial flowers in it, and the same stuff gown she had worn since he first saw her, with her apron in her hand, it is true, ready to go to her eyes as soon as a reasonable opportunity occurred, but otherwise the same Mrs Thompson as before. And yet she would never wait upon *her* again.

'It was all so sudden, sir,' she said, in answer to Mr Braggett's inquiries, 'that there was no time to send for nobody.'

'But Miss Cray had my address.'

'Ah! perhaps so; but she was off her head, poor dear, and couldn't think of nothing. But she remembered you, sir, to the last; for the very morning she died, she sprung up in bed and called out, 'Sigismund! Sigismund!' as loud as ever she could, and she never spoke to anybody afterwards, not one word.'

'She left no message for me?'

'None, sir. I asked her the day before she went if I was to say nothing to you for her (knowing you was such friends), and all her answer was, "I wrote to him. He's got my letter." So I thought, perhaps, you had heard, sir.'

'Not for some time past. It seems terribly sudden to me, not having heard even of her illness. Where is she buried?'

'Close by in the churchyard, sir. My little girl will go with you and show you the place, if you'd like to see it.'

Mr Braggett accepted her offer and left.

When he was standing by a heap of clods they called a grave, and had dismissed the child, he drew out Miss Cray's last

letter, which he carried in his pocket, and read it over.

'You tell me that I am not to call at your office again, except on business' (so it ran), 'nor to send letters to your private address, lest it should come to the knowledge of your wife, and create unpleasantness between you; but I *shall* call, and I *shall* write, until I have seen Mrs Braggett, and, if you don't take care, I will introduce myself to her and tell her the reason you have been afraid to do so.'

This letter had made Mr Braggett terribly angry at the time of reception. He had puffed and fumed, and cursed Miss Charlotte by all his gods for daring to threaten him. But he read it with different feelings now Miss Charlotte was down there, six feet beneath the ground he stood on, and he could feel only compassion for her frenzy, and resentment against himself for having excited it. As he travelled home from Hammersmith to Streatham, he was a very dejected publisher indeed.

He did not tell Mrs Braggett the reason of his melancholy, but it affected him to

that degree that he could not go to office on the following day, but stayed at home instead, to be petted and waited upon by his pretty wife, which treatment resulted in a complete cure. The next morning, therefore, he started for London as briskly as ever, and arrived at office before his usual time. A clerk, deputed to receive all messages for his master, followed him behind the ground-glass doors, with a packet of letters.

'Mr Van Ower was here yesterday, sir. He will let you have the copy before the end of the week, and Messrs Hanleys' foreman called on particular business, and will look in to-day at eleven. And Mr Ellis came to ask if there was any answer to his letter yet; and Miss Cray called, sir; and that's all.'

'*Who* did you say?' cried Braggett.

'Miss Cray, sir. She waited for you above an hour, but I told her I thought you couldn't mean to come into town at all, so she went.'

'Do you know what you're talking about, Hewetson? You said *Miss Cray!*'

'And I meant it, sir—Miss Charlotte Cray. Burns spoke to her as well as I.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Mr Braggett, turning as white as a sheet. 'Go at once and send Burns to me.' Burns came.

'Burns, who was the lady that called to see me yesterday?'

'Miss Cray, sir. She had a very thick veil on, and she looked so pale that I asked her if she had been ill, and she said "Yes." She sat in the office for over an hour, hoping you'd come in, but as you didn't, she went away again.'

'Did she lift her veil?'

'Not whilst I spoke to her, sir.'

'How do you know it was Miss Cray, then?'

The clerk stared. 'Well, sir, we all know her pretty well by this time.'

'Did you ask her name?'

'No, sir; there was no need to do it.'

'You're mistaken, that's all, both you and Hewetson. It couldn't have been Miss Cray! I know for certain that she is—is—is—not in London at present. It must have been a stranger.'

'It was not, indeed, sir, begging your pardon. I could tell Miss Cray anywhere, by her figure and her voice, without seeing her face. But I *did* see her face, and remarked how awfully pale she was—just like death, sir!'

'There! there! that will do! It's of no consequence, and you can go back to your work.'

But any one who had seen Mr Braggett, when left alone in his office, would not have said he thought the matter of no consequence. The perspiration broke out upon his forehead, although it was December, and he rocked himself backward and forward in his chair with agitation.

At last he rose hurriedly, upset his throne, and dashed through the outer premises in the face of twenty people waiting to speak to him. As soon as he could find his voice, he hailed a hansom, and drove to Hammersmith. Good Mrs Thompson opening the door to him, thought he looked as if he had just come out of a fever.

'Lor' bless me, sir! whatever's the matter?'

'Mrs Thompson, have you told me the truth about Miss Cray? Is she really dead?'

'*Really dead*, sir! Why, I closed her eyes, and put her in the coffin with my own hands! If she ain't dead, I don't know who is! But if you doubt my word, you'd better ask the doctor that gave the certificate for her.'

'What is the doctor's name?'

'Dodson; he lives opposite.'

'You must forgive my strange questions, Mrs Thompson, but I have had a terrible dream about my poor friend, and I think I should like to talk to the doctor about her.'

'Oh, very good, sir,' cried the landlady, much offended. 'I'm not afraid of what the doctor will tell you. She had excellent nursing and everything as she could desire, and there's nothing on my conscience on that score, so I'll wish you good morning.' And with that Mrs Thompson slammed the door in Mr Braggett's face.

He found Dr Dodson at home.

'If I understand you rightly,' said the

practitioner, looking rather steadfastly in the scared face of his visitor, 'you wish, as a friend of the late Miss Cray's, to see a copy of the certificate of her death? Very good, sir; here it is. She died, as you will perceive, on the twenty-fifth of November, of peritonitis. She had, I can assure you, every attention and care, but nothing could have saved her.'

'You are quite sure, then, she is dead?' demanded Mr Braggett, in a vague manner.

The doctor looked at him as if he were not quite sure if he were sane.

'If seeing a patient die, and her corpse coffined and buried, is being sure she is dead, *I* am in no doubt whatever about Miss Cray.'

'It is very strange—most strange and unaccountable,' murmured poor Mr Braggett, in reply, as he shuffled out of the doctor's passage, and took his way back to the office.

Here, however, after an interval of rest and a strong brandy and soda, he managed to pull himself together, and to come to the conclusion that the doctor and Mrs

Thompson *could* not be mistaken, and that, consequently, the clerks *must.* He did not mention the subject again to them, however; and as the days went on, and nothing more was heard of the mysterious stranger's visit, Mr Braggett put it altogether out of his mind.

At the end of a fortnight, however, when he was thinking of something totally different, young Hewetson remarked to him, carelessly,—

'Miss Cray was here again yesterday, sir. She walked in just as your cab had left the door.'

All the horror of his first suspicions returned with double force upon the unhappy man's mind.

'Don't talk nonsense!' he gasped, angrily, as soon as he could speak. 'Don't attempt to play any of your tricks on me, young man, or it will be the worse for you, I can tell you.'

'Tricks, sir!' stammered the clerk. 'I don't know what you are alluding to. I am only telling you the truth. You have always desired me to be most particular

in letting you know the names of the people who call in your absence, and I thought I was only doing my duty in making a point of ascertaining them—'

'Yes, yes! Hewetson, of course,' replied Mr Braggett, passing his handkerchief over his brow, 'and you are quite right in following my directions as closely as possible; only—in this case you are completely mistaken, and it is the second time you have committed the error.'

'Mistaken!'

'Yes!—as mistaken as it is possible for a man to be! Miss Cray *could* not have called at this office yesterday.'

'But she did, sir.'

'Am I labouring under some horrible nightmare?' exclaimed the publisher, 'or are we playing at cross purposes? Can you mean the Miss Cray I mean?'

'I am speaking of Miss Charlotte Cray, sir, the author of "Sweet Gwendoline,"—the lady who has undertaken so much of our compilation the last two years, and who has a long nose, and wears her hair in curls. I never knew there was another

Miss Cray; but if there are two, that is the one I mean.'

'Still I *cannot* believe it, Hewetson, for the Miss Cray who has been associated with our firm died on the twenty-fifth of last month.'

'*Died*, sir! Is Miss Cray dead? Oh, it can't be! It's some humbugging trick that's been played upon you, for I'd swear she was in this room yesterday afternoon, as full of life as she's ever been since I knew her. She didn't talk much, it's true, for she seemed in a hurry to be off again, but she had got on the same dress and bonnet she was in here last, and she made herself as much at home in the office as she ever did. Besides,' continued Hewetson, as though suddenly remembering something, 'she left a note for you, sir.'

'A note! Why did you not say so before?'

'It slipped my memory when you began to doubt my word in that way, sir. But you'll find it in the bronze vase. She told me to tell you she had placed it there.'

Mr Braggett made a dash at the vase,

and found the three-cornered note as he had been told. Yes! it was Charlotte's handwriting, or the facsimile of it, there was no doubt of that; and his hands shook so he could hardly open the paper. It contained these words:

'You tell me that I am not to call at your office again, except on business, nor to send letters to your private address, lest it should come to the knowledge of your wife, and create unpleasantness between you; but I *shall* call, and I *shall* write until I have seen Mrs Braggett, and if you don't take care I will introduce myself to her, and tell her the reason you have been afraid to do so.'

Precisely the same words, in the same writing of the letter he still carried in his breast-pocket, and which no mortal eyes but his and hers had ever seen. As the unhappy man sat gazing at the opened note, his whole body shook as if he were attacked by ague.

'It is Miss Cray's handwriting, isn't it, sir?'

'It looks like it, Hewetson, but it can-

not be. I tell you it is an impossibility! Miss Cray died last month, and I have seen not only her grave, but the doctor and nurse who attended her in her last illness. It is folly, then, to suppose either that she called here or wrote that letter.'

'Then *who could it have been*, sir?' said Hewetson, attacked with a sudden terror in his turn.

'That is impossible for me to say; but should the lady call again, you had better ask her boldly for her name and address.'

'I'd rather you'd depute the office to anybody but me, sir,' replied the clerk, as he hastily backed out of the room.

Mr Braggett, dying with suspense and conjecture, went through his business as best he could, and hurried home to Violet Villa.

There he found that his wife had been spending the day with a friend, and only entered the house a few minutes before himself.

'Siggy, dear!' she commenced, as soon as he joined her in the drawing-room after dinner; 'I really think we should have the

fastenings and bolts of this house looked to. Such a funny thing happened whilst I was out this afternoon. Ellen has just been telling me about it.'

'What sort of a thing, dear?'

'Well, I left home as early as twelve, you know, and told the servants I shouldn't be back until dinner-time; so they were all enjoying themselves in the kitchen, I suppose, when cook told Ellen she heard a footstep in the drawing-room. Ellen thought at first it must be cook's fancy, because she was sure the front door was fastened; but when they listened, they all heard the noise together, so she ran upstairs, and what on earth do you think she saw?'

'How can I guess, my dear?'

'Why, a lady, seated in this very room, as if she was waiting for somebody. She was oldish, Ellen says, and had a very white face, with long curls hanging down each side of it; and she wore a blue bonnet with white feathers, and a long black cloak, and—'

'Emily, Emily! Stop! You don't

know what you're talking about. That girl is a fool: you must send her away. That is, how could the lady have got in if the door was closed? Good heavens! you'll all drive me mad between you with your folly!' exclaimed Mr Braggett, as he threw himself back in his chair, with an exclamation that sounded very like a groan.

Pretty Mrs Braggett was offended. What had she said or done that her husband should doubt her word? She tossed her head in indignation, and remained silent. If Mr Braggett wanted any further information, he would have to apologise.

'Forgive me, darling,' he said, after a long pause. 'I don't think I'm very well this evening, but your story seemed to upset me.'

'I don't see why it should upset you,' returned Mrs Braggett. 'If strangers are allowed to come prowling about the house in this way, we shall be robbed some day, and then you'll say I should have told you of it.'

'Wouldn't she—this person—give her name?'

'Oh! I'd rather say no more about it. You had better ask Ellen.'

'No, Emily! I'd rather hear it from you.'

'Well, don't interrupt me again, then. When Ellen saw the woman seated here, she asked her her name and business at once, but she gave no answer, and only sat and stared at her. And so Ellen, feeling very uncomfortable, had just turned round to call up cook, when the woman got up, and dashed past her like a flash of lightning, and they saw nothing more of her!'

'Which way did she leave the house?'

'Nobody knows any more than how she came in. The servants declare the hall-door was neither opened nor shut—but, of course, it must have been. She was a tall gaunt woman, Ellen says, about fifty, and she's sure her hair was dyed. She must have come to steal something, and that's why I say we ought to have the house made more secure. Why, Siggy! Siggy! what's the matter? Here, Ellen! Jane! come, quick, some of you! Your master's fainted!'

And, sure enough, the repeated shocks and horrors of the day had had such an effect upon poor Mr Braggett, that for a moment he did lose all consciousness of what surrounded him. He was thankful to take advantage of the Christmas holidays, to run over to Paris with his wife, and try to forget, in the many marvels of that city, the awful fear that fastened upon him at the mention of anything connected with home. He might be enjoying himself to the top of his bent; but directly the remembrance of Charlotte Cray crossed his mind, all sense of enjoyment vanished, and he trembled at the mere thought of returning to his business, as a child does when sent to bed in the dark.

He tried to hide the state of his feelings from Mrs Braggett, but she was too sharp for him. The simple, blushing Emily Primrose had developed, under the influence of the matrimonial forcing-frame, into a good watch-dog, and nothing escaped her notice.

Left to her own conjecture, she attributed his frequent moods of dejection to

the existence of some other woman, and became jealous accordingly. If Siggy did not love her, why had he married her? She felt certain there was some other horrid creature who had engaged his affections and would not leave him alone, even now that he was her own lawful property. And to find out who the 'horrid creature' was became Mrs Emily's constant idea. When she had found out, she meant to give her a piece of her mind, never fear! Meanwhile Mr Braggett's evident distaste to returning to business only served to increase his wife's suspicions. A clear conscience, she argued, would know no fear. So they were not a happy couple, as they set their faces once more towards England. Mr Braggett's dread of re-entering his office amounted almost to terror, and Mrs Braggett, putting this and that together, resolved that she would fathom the mystery, if it lay in feminine *finesse* to do so. She did not whisper a word of her intentions to dear Siggy, you may be sure of that! She worked after the manner of her amiable sex, like a cat

in the dark, or a worm boring through the earth, and appearing on the surface when least expected.

So poor Mr Braggett brought her home again, heavy at heart indeed, but quite ignorant that any designs were being made against him. I think he would have given a thousand pounds to be spared the duty of attending office the day after his arrival. But it was necessary, and he went, like a publisher and a Briton. But Mrs Emily had noted his trepidation and his fears, and laid her plans accordingly. She had never been asked to enter those mysterious precincts, the house of business. Mr Braggett had not thought it necessary that her blooming loveliness should be made acquainted with its dingy, dusty accessories, but she meant to see them for herself to-day. So she waited till he had left Violet Villa ten minutes, and then she dressed and followed him by the next train to London.

Mr Sigismund Braggett meanwhile had gone on his way, as people go to a dentist, determined to do what was right, but with

an indefinite sort of idea that he might never come out of it alive. He dreaded to hear what might have happened in his absence, and he delayed his arrival at the office for half-an-hour, by walking there instead of taking a cab as usual, in order to put off the evil moment. As he entered the place, however, he saw at a glance that his efforts were vain, and that something had occurred. The customary formality and precision of the office were upset, and the clerks, instead of bending over their ledgers, or attending to the demands of business, were all huddled together at one end whispering and gesticulating to each other. But as soon as the publisher appeared, a dead silence fell upon the group, and they only stared at him with an air of horrid mystery.

'What is the matter now?' he demanded, angrily, for like most men when in a fright which they are ashamed to exhibit, Mr Sigismund Braggett tried to cover his want of courage by bounce.

The young man called Hewetson advanced towards him, with a face the

colour of ashes, and pointed towards the ground-glass doors dumbly.

'What do you mean? Can't you speak? What's come to the lot of you, that you are neglecting my business in this fashion to make fools of yourselves?'

'If you please, sir, she's in there.'

Mr Bragget started back as if he'd been shot. But still he tried to have it out.

'*She!* Who's *she?*'

'Miss Cray, sir.'

'Haven't I told you already that's a lie.'

'Will you judge for yourself, Mr Braggett?' said a grey-haired man, stepping forward. 'I was on the stairs myself just now when Miss Cray passed me, and I have no doubt whatever but that you will find her in your private room, however much the reports that have lately reached you may seem against the probability of such a thing.'

Mr Braggett's teeth chattered in his head as he advanced to the ground-glass doors, through the panes of one of which there was a little peephole to ascertain if

the room were occupied or not. He stooped and looked in. At the table, with her back towards him, was seated the well-known figure of Charlotte Cray. He recognised at once the long black mantle in which she was wont to drape her gaunt figure—the blue bonnet, with its dejected-looking, uncurled feather—the lank curls which rested on her shoulders—and the black-leather bag, with a steel clasp, which she always carried in her hand. It was the embodiment of Charlotte Cray, he had no doubt of that; but how could he reconcile the fact of her being there with the damp clods he had seen piled upon her grave, with the certificate of death, and the doctor's and landlady's assertion that they had watched her last moments?

At last he prepared, with desperate energy, to turn the handle of the door. At that moment the attention of the more frivolous of the clerks was directed from his actions by the entrance of an uncommonly pretty woman at the other end of the outer office. Such a lovely creature as this seldom brightened the gloom of

their dusty abiding-place. Lilies, roses, and carnations vied with each other in her complexion, whilst the sunniest of locks, and the brightest of blue eyes, lent her face a girlish charm not easily described. What could this fashionably-attired Venus want in their house of business?

'Is Mr Braggett here? I am Mrs Braggett. Please show me in to him immediately.'

They glanced at the ground-glass doors of the inner office. They had already closed behind the manly form of their employer.

'This way, madam,' one said, deferentially, as he escorted her to the presence of Mr Braggett.

Meanwhile, Sigismund had opened the portals of the Temple of Mystery, and with trembling knees entered it. The figure in the chair did not stir at his approach. He stood at the door irresolute. What should he do or say?

'Charlotte,' he whispered.

Still she did not move.

At that moment his wife entered.

'Oh, Sigismund!' cried Mrs Emily,

reproachfully, 'I knew you were keeping something from me, and now I've caught you in the very act. Who is this lady, and what is her name? I shall refuse to leave the room until I know it.'

At the sound of her rival's voice, the woman in the chair rose quickly to her feet and confronted them. Yes! there was Charlotte Cray, precisely similar to what she had appeared in life, only with an uncertainty and vagueness about the lines of the familiar features that made them ghastly.

She stood there, looking Mrs Emily full in the face, but only for a moment, for, even as she gazed, the lineaments grew less and less distinct, with the shape of the figure that supported them, until, with a crash, the apparition seemed to fall in and disappear, and the place that had known her was filled with empty air.

'Where is she gone?' exclaimed Mrs Braggett, in a tone of utter amazement.

'Where is *who* gone?' repeated Mr Braggett, hardly able to articulate from fear.

'The lady in the chair!'

'There was no one there except in your own imagination. It was my great-coat that you mistook for a figure,' returned her husband hastily, as he threw the article in question over the back of the arm-chair.

'But how could that have been?' said his pretty wife, rubbing her eyes. 'How could I think a coat had eyes, and hair, and features? I am *sure* I saw a woman seated there, and that she rose and stared at me. Siggy! tell me it was true. It seems so incomprehensible that I should have been mistaken.'

'You must question your own sense. You see that the room is empty now, except for ourselves, and you know that no one has left it. If you like to search under the table, you can.'

'Ah! now, Siggy, you are laughing at me, because you know that would be folly. But there was certainly some one here—only, where can she have disappeared to?'

'Suppose we discuss the matter at a more convenient season,' replied Mr Braggett, as he drew his wife's arm through his

arm. 'Hewetson! you will be able to tell Mr Hume that he was mistaken. Say, also, that I shall not be back in the office to-day. I am not so strong as I thought I was, and feel quite unequal to business. Tell him to come out to Streatham this evening with my letters, and I will talk with him there.'

What passed at that interview was never disclosed; but pretty Mrs Braggett was much rejoiced, a short time afterwards, by her husband telling her that he had resolved to resign his active share of the business, and devote the rest of his life to her and Violet Villa. He would have no more occasion, therefore, to visit the office, and be exposed to the temptation of spending four or five hours out of every twelve away from her side. For, though Mrs Emily had arrived at the conclusion that the momentary glimpse she caught of a lady in Siggy's office must have been a delusion, she was not quite satisfied by his assertions that she would never have found a more tangible cause for her jealousy.

But Sigismund Braggett knew more

than he chose to tell Mrs Emily. He knew that what she had witnessed was no delusion, but a reality; and that Charlotte Cray had carried out her dying determination to call at his office and his private residence, *until she had seen his wife!*

END OF VOL. III.

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